

WORLD LIBERTY CONGRESS · WORLD LIBERTY ACADEMY

PRACTICAL TRAINING MANUAL · ACTION PLANNING UNDER AUTHORITARIANISM

Nonviolent Discipline and Tactical Design

A practical manual for action planning under authoritarianism, hybrid regimes, and transitional openings

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A training document of the World Liberty Academy. Operational extension of Principles 5 and 12 of the Playbook for Liberty.

Anchor premise. Nonviolent discipline is not passivity. It is the operational architecture that allows a democratic movement to act with courage while protecting people, preserving legitimacy, and converting repression into political, legal, moral, and international cost. This manual exists so that every action planner can turn that discipline into a usable plan before the first participant arrives.

AUTHOR NOTE

On the purpose, the audience, and the limits of this manual

This manual is written for members of the World Liberty Congress and participants of the World Liberty Academy who are preparing nonviolent actions under authoritarian, hybrid, or transitional regimes. It draws from the Playbook for Liberty, the Berlin Manifesto, the WLC Theory of Change, and the lived experience of freedom fighters who have faced prison, exile, denationalization, surveillance, smear campaigns, and threats to their families. It also draws on the civil resistance tradition of Gene Sharp, Erica Chenoweth, Maria J. Stephan, Brian Martin, Srdja Popovic and CANVAS, Marshall Ganz, Ronald Heifetz, my own experience at the Civil Society Leadership Institute and the University of Virginia.

The manual does not romanticize risk. It does not ask participants to seek prison, martyrdom, or symbolic suffering. The purpose is the opposite. It is to protect people while designing actions that create pressure, preserve dignity, and build democratic power. A movement that asks courage to do the work of architecture is a movement that has not yet done its planning. Courage deserves better.



INTRODUCTION

Why this manual exists

Every movement eventually faces a hard question. We know what we oppose, but how do we act without giving the regime the chaos it wants? The answer begins with discipline. Not discipline as obedience to a single leader, and not discipline as silence. Discipline is the capacity of a movement to act with purpose under pressure, to protect people before danger arrives, to keep its message clear when the regime provokes confusion, and to convert what happens into the next stage of strategy.

The Playbook for Liberty teaches two principles that belong together. Principle 5 explains why nonviolent discipline is both a moral and strategic instrument. Principle 12 teaches that repression is not an accident in authoritarian systems. It is one of their operating methods. A mature movement does not panic when repression comes. It anticipates, protects, documents, communicates, mobilizes, escalates, cares, and learns.

This manual turns those principles into an action-planning tool. It is not a summary of the Playbook. It is an operational extension. It is written for the action commander who has to decide whether to proceed next Friday, the spokesperson who will face cameras after the first arrest, the documentarian who must protect evidence, the family liaison who must call relatives before rumors spread, and the after-action debrief lead who must make sure the action becomes knowledge rather than exhaustion.

The reader may be inside a closed dictatorship, in exile, in a host country with mixed protections, or in a hybrid environment where some legal space still exists but repression is selective and unpredictable. The manual does not assume friendly courts, free media, safe banking, or good-faith police. It also does not assume that every action must look like a protest. A nonviolent action may be a silent vigil, a prayer gathering, a coordinated refusal, a cultural event, an election-integrity observation plan, a worker slow-down, a prisoner-family advocacy day, a diaspora

briefing, or a carefully sequenced campaign that unfolds across several countries at once.

The end product is always the same. A five-component Action Plan with roles, risks, protocols for handling provocation, public message framework, and protection plan. Each component appears in this manual as a fillable canvas. A WLC member should be able to complete these canvases for a real action this month. If the team cannot fill them in, the action is not ready. That is not a failure. It is an early warning that may save lives, preserve legitimacy, and improve the strategy.

“A movement that asks courage to do the work of architecture is a movement that has not yet done its planning. Courage deserves better.”

Use this manual in three moments. Use it before action to design roles, risk thresholds, messages, and protection. Use it during action to maintain discipline under provocation. Use it after action to convert the event into evidence, advocacy, sanctions material, legal follow-up, coalition growth, or strategic learning. If the action ends when the crowd disperses, the movement has left power on the table.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *What action are you preparing, and what change is it supposed to produce?*
- › *Who is most exposed if the action goes wrong?*
- › *Which part of your current plan is still based on hope rather than preparation?*



SECTION I

Why nonviolent discipline is strategy, not sentiment

Nonviolent discipline is often misunderstood by two kinds of people. Some supporters treat it as a statement of moral purity. Some critics treat it as weakness. Both misunderstand the operational core. For the World Liberty Congress, nonviolent discipline is a way of organizing power. It is the deliberate withdrawal of consent, cooperation, legitimacy, labor, silence, and fear, organized by people who refuse to reproduce the methods of the domination they oppose.

This does not make the WLC an absolutist pacifist organization. The Playbook recognizes a narrow defensive-force exception. In extreme cases, defensive force

may be justified only when it is lawful, proportionate, defensive in character, and a genuine last resort. Those four conditions are cumulative. They are not a loophole. They are a discipline. Most pro-democracy actions will not meet them, and should not try to force themselves into them.

The pragmatic case for nonviolent discipline rests on evidence and mechanics. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan showed in *Why Civil Resistance Works* that nonviolent campaigns historically succeeded more often than violent campaigns, mobilized broader participation, and were more likely to produce democratic outcomes after transition. Their findings should not be treated as magic. The environment has become harder. Regimes have learned. Surveillance has improved. Foreign autocracies support one another. But the core logic remains. Broad, disciplined, diverse participation can create pressure that armed struggle usually cannot.

Violent strategies narrow participation. They exclude the elderly, many women, religious communities, workers who cannot disappear into armed structures, families of prisoners, professionals, and ordinary citizens who may be willing to resist but not to fight. Nonviolent discipline expands the field of action. It allows the teacher, the nurse, the shopkeeper, the priest, the student, the mother, the exiled son, and the public employee to participate in different ways according to risk, conscience, and capacity.

The mechanic of nonviolent power is not that the dictator suddenly feels shame. Gene Sharp taught that rulers depend on sources of power that require cooperation. Police, courts, civil servants, media, business elites, workers, financial systems, teachers, religious hierarchies, and ordinary citizens continue to obey because they are afraid, dependent, misinformed, or unconvinced that change is possible. The strategic question is not how do we defeat the dictator as a person. The question is which pillar can we move, divide, slow, expose, neutralize, or persuade next.

Discipline matters because regimes need a story. They want to say that the movement is violent, foreign-controlled, criminal, immoral, extremist, anti-national, anti-religious, or chaotic. They want one image, one stone, one insult, one planted weapon, one fabricated social media post, one confused spokesperson, or one panicked rumor that allows them to justify what they already intended to do. Nonviolent discipline denies them that story. It does not always prevent repression. Often it cannot. But it can make repression more costly.

Srdja Popovic and CANVAS have trained movements to think in terms of unity, planning, and discipline. Unity does not mean ideological sameness. Planning does not mean rigidity. Discipline does not mean submission. Together, they mean that the movement knows what it is doing, why it is doing it, who is responsible, how it

will protect people, and how it will respond when the regime tries to distort the action.

“The first test of a nonviolent action is not whether it is brave. It is whether it builds power.”

The first test of a nonviolent action is not whether it is brave. It is whether it builds power. A brave action without sequence may inspire people and then vanish. A disciplined action with sequence can recruit, document, persuade, protect, and set up the next action. The difference is design.

Security warning. Do not confuse willingness to accept risk with permission to expose others. Participants may choose their own risk only when they understand it. They may not choose risk on behalf of families, inside-country sources, volunteers, or undocumented supporters who have not consented.

This is why the action commander must never ask only, are we ready to act. The better question is. Are we ready for what the regime will do after we act.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *Which part of your action depends on the regime behaving better than it usually behaves?*
- › *What would the regime need in order to portray your action as violent or foreign-directed?*
- › *Which participants can safely take visible roles, and which should not be visible at all?*



SECTION II

The backfire mechanism and its six conditions

Backfire is the process by which repression harms the perpetrator. Brian Martin called this dynamic Justice Ignited. The Playbook for Liberty uses the concept operationally. Repression can become evidence, evidence can become narrative, narrative can become pressure, and pressure can become cost. But repression does not automatically backfire. Many regimes repress for years with little cost because abuse remains hidden, victims are stigmatized, evidence is weak, movements react chaotically, or allies have no channel through which to act.

The complete formula is simple enough to memorize and demanding enough to require planning. Abuse plus documentation plus discipline plus narrative plus allies plus pressure equals backfire. Remove one element and the chain weakens.

Condition 1. Visibility

The abuse must become visible to the right audience. Visibility does not always mean immediate publication. A video released too early may expose a victim, reveal the person filming, or destroy a legal strategy. Sometimes visibility is confidential. A lawyer receives the medical report, a sanctions team receives the file, a rapporteur receives verified evidence, a parliamentarian receives the briefing. Hidden abuse rarely imposes cost. Reckless visibility can impose cost on the wrong people.

Condition 2. Credibility

The evidence must be trustworthy. Dates, locations, names, institutional links, medical records, arrest documents, court filings, witness accounts, metadata, and chain of custody all matter. Rumor is not evidence. A movement that circulates unverified claims may win attention for a day and lose credibility for a year. Under repression, credibility is a form of protection.

Condition 3. Innocence and discipline

The public must understand the victims as people exercising legitimate rights. This is not a demand that victims be perfect. It is a demand that the movement not hand the regime the evidence it wants. When participants maintain discipline under provocation, the moral contrast sharpens. When they react with vengeance, the contrast blurs.

Condition 4. Moral framing

A beating is not only a beating. It is evidence that the regime fears its own citizens. A political trial is not only a legal event. It is evidence that courts have become instruments of domination. A passport cancellation is not only bureaucracy. It is an attempt to erase a person from the political community. Framing gives meaning to facts. Without framing, the regime will supply its own meaning.

Condition 5. Channels of response

There must be pathways for people and institutions to react. These may include families, local communities, religious leaders, unions, professional associations, universities, journalists, diaspora networks, lawyers, embassies, legislators, sanctions offices, UN mechanisms, and courts. Backfire requires connective

infrastructure. If no one knows what to do with the evidence, the evidence remains inert.

Condition 6. Strategic conversion

The movement must convert repression into consequence. Consequence may mean a legal filing, a named-perpetrator dossier, a public hearing, a sanctions submission, a prisoner campaign, a safe-harbor request, a donor emergency fund, or a coordinated media action. Sympathy is not enough. Sympathy must be organized into a decision.

“Abuse does not become pressure by itself. It becomes pressure when disciplined people carry verified truth into institutions that can act.”

Failure modes. Visibility without credibility becomes noise. Credibility without narrative becomes a file. Narrative without allies becomes indignation. Allies without pressure become ceremony. Pressure without care becomes exploitation.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › Which of the six backfire conditions is strongest in your current action plan?
- › Which condition is weakest?
- › Who will convert evidence into a decision after the action?



SECTION III

Tactical design fundamentals

A nonviolent action should not begin with the question, what can we do that people will notice. It should begin with the question, what change are we trying to produce, and what action can move us toward that change without exposing people unnecessarily. Tactical design is the discipline that connects action to outcome.

1. Clear strategic purpose

Every action needs a purpose that can be stated in one sentence. A vague purpose such as raising awareness is usually too weak. A stronger purpose names the target, the desired change, and the time frame. For example, within thirty days, secure public commitments from ten legislators to support emergency visas for

threatened journalists. Or, within ninety days, create verified case files for twenty political prisoners and deliver them to three accountability channels.

2. Sequenced participation

Not every participant should face the same level of risk. Mature movements design pathways from low-risk to higher-risk participation. Someone can sign a statement, attend a private briefing, distribute verified information, join a public event, serve as an observer, provide transport, document evidence, or take a visible leadership role. Sequencing allows the movement to grow without demanding that everyone begin at the highest level of exposure.

3. Dilemma logic

A dilemma action places the regime in a difficult choice. If the regime tolerates the action, the movement gains visibility and confidence. If the regime represses it, the regime reveals fear and cruelty. Dilemma logic requires restraint. It works when the action is legitimate, clear, and disciplined. It fails when the action is so confusing that the public cannot see what the regime is repressing.

4. Protection of participants

Protection is part of the tactic, not a separate service. An action that cannot protect its people should be redesigned. Protection includes legal preparation, medical support, digital posture, family communication, role succession, safe exits, and post-action care. Under transnational repression, protection also includes relatives at home and activists abroad.

5. Documentation infrastructure

An action without documentation leaves the regime free to write the story. Documentation must be planned before the action. Who records, who writes, who collects testimonies, who stores evidence, who decides what can be public, who protects the identity of those inside the country. These answers belong in the action plan, not in a chaotic chat after repression begins.

6. Narrative discipline

The message must be ready before the action. Pre-action, during-action, and post-action lines should be drafted in advance. This prevents emotional improvisation when the regime provokes. The spokesperson should never be forced to invent doctrine under fire. Holding lines should be prepared for incidents that arise faster than verification.

7. After-action conversion

The action is not complete when it ends physically. It is complete when its results have been converted into the next strategic step. That may be a legal file, a

sanctions request, a donor briefing, a media story, a recruitment cycle, a coalition meeting, or a lesson for the Playbook. If no conversion follows, the action may have been expressive, but not strategic.

THE SEVEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES AT A GLANCE

Design principle	Question to answer before action	Operational product
Strategic purpose	What concrete result are we seeking?	One-sentence objective
Sequenced participation	How can people join at different levels of risk?	Participation ladder
Dilemma logic	What cost does the regime pay if it represses or tolerates?	Dilemma statement
Protection	Who could be harmed, and how are they protected?	Protection plan
Documentation	What evidence must be preserved, by whom, under what consent?	Evidence protocol
Narrative	What do we say before, during, and after?	Message framework
Conversion	What happens after the action ends physically?	Next-stage plan

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *Can your team state the action objective in one sentence?*
- › *Does the action create a dilemma for the regime, or only a platform for the movement?*
- › *What is the next strategic step after the action ends?*



SECTION IV

The five-component Action Plan template

The Action Plan is the core deliverable of this manual. It should be completed before any significant action. It can be filled in by a small team, but it should be understood by everyone with an operational role. Sensitive details should be compartmentalized. Not every participant needs the whole plan. The action

commander, security lead, legal contact, and documentation lead need the full picture. Most participants need only their role, risk, message, and emergency instructions.

How to use this section. Complete the canvases in order. Do not start with public messaging. Start with roles, because unclear responsibility produces chaos. Then assess risks. Then prepare provocation protocols. Then write messages. Then build protection around the people most exposed.

Component 1. Roles

Every action needs named responsibility. A role without a name is a role that no one will hold under stress. A role without a backup is a single point of failure that the regime can exploit through arrest, injury, digital compromise, panic, loss of contact, or sudden family pressure. The nine roles below are the operational minimum. In small actions, one person may hold two roles, but the responsibilities themselves do not disappear.

Role	Responsibilities	Training requirements	Succession
Action commander	Holds operational responsibility, confirms go or no-go decisions, manages timing, and receives reports from leads.	Action sequence, risk thresholds, communication chain, de-escalation.	Deputy commander. If both are removed, security lead assumes only the withdrawal function.
Spokesperson	Carries the public message, uses verified facts only, and refuses speculation under pressure.	Message discipline, interview practice, holding lines, scenario messaging.	Backup spokesperson. If unavailable, written statement only.
Observer	Watches regime behavior, participant discipline, and escalation signals without joining the action itself.	Observation protocol, note-taking, legal boundaries, personal safety.	Secondary observer assigned to a separate angle or location.
Documentarian	Preserves visual, written, and testimonial evidence according to consent and chain-of-custody rules.	Evidence standards, consent, metadata protection, secure storage.	Backup documentarian with separate device and secure upload plan.
Security lead	Monitors physical, digital, social, and transnational	Threat triage, digital hygiene, crowd	Deputy security lead. If removed, action

Role	Responsibilities	Training requirements	Succession
	risks, advises on pause or withdrawal, and protects participants.	safety, family-risk mapping.	commander follows pre-agreed withdrawal threshold.
Legal contact	Coordinates lawyers, arrest response, case tracking, and legal documentation.	Local law, arrest protocols, evidence preservation, family communication.	Secondary lawyer or legal NGO contact.
Medical contact	Coordinates first aid, medical evacuation, and post-action care.	Basic first aid, emergency routing, confidentiality.	Backup medical volunteer or clinic contact.
Family liaison	Communicates with families, confirms safety, and prevents families from learning through rumor or social media.	Trauma-aware communication, confidentiality, contact trees.	Backup family liaison with access to emergency contact list.
After-action debrief lead	Runs the review within seventy-two hours and converts lessons into next actions.	AAR method, safe documentation, facilitation.	Backup debrief lead from outside the action team.

Role clarity is not bureaucracy. It is how a movement avoids improvising under repression. Every role must have a named person, a backup, and a removal plan. If the action cannot continue without one person, the action is too fragile.

Component 2. Risks

Risk assessment must be honest. Do not lower a risk score because the truth is inconvenient. A high-risk action may still proceed if the objective is serious, the participants consent, and the protection plan is adequate. A low-value action should not expose people to high risk. The ratio matters. Strategic value must justify exposure. The nine categories below cover the operational landscape under contemporary authoritarianism. For each, name likelihood, severity, mitigation, and the specific event that cancels, pauses, relocates, or postpones the action.

Risk category	What to assess	What to define
Physical	Crowd violence, police violence, detention, raids, injury, vehicular threats.	Escape routes, medical contacts, withdrawal threshold.

Risk category	What to assess	What to define
Legal	Charges, fines, summons, detention risks, permit rules, host-country exposure.	Legal counsel, arrest protocol, threshold for legal red line.
Administrative	Passport cancellation, employment loss, school expulsion, license revocation, registration cancellation.	Backup documents, alternative pathways, advance notice plan.
Financial	Account freezes, transfer monitoring, donor exposure, employer pressure, family livelihood risk.	Diversified funds, donor notification protocol, emergency fund.
Digital	Device seizure, spyware, phishing, account takeover, doxxing, metadata exposure, internet shutdowns.	Encrypted tools, digital posture, data minimization plan.
Informational	Smear narratives, false flags, fake opposition accounts, regime influencers, rumor cascades.	Pre-drafted rebuttal lines, monitoring team, holding line.
Social	Risks to families, churches, schools, employers, neighbors, community reputation, religious networks.	Family briefing, employer notification plan, community shielding.
Transnational	Embassy harassment, Interpol abuse, threats abroad, family pressure at home, surveillance across borders.	Host-country law enforcement contact, FBI or analogous program, Regional Secretary alert.
Psychological	Panic, trauma activation, burnout, humiliation, isolation, post-action distress.	Mental-health support, peer rotation, decompression plan.

On the cancel-or-postpone threshold. For each category, write the specific event that ends the action. Not a feeling. An event. Examples: a credible threat against a named family member inside the country; the loss of legal counsel for participants under arrest; a permit revocation with no safe alternative location; a documented infiltration that cannot be quietly contained; a sudden escalation by security forces that exceeds the planned risk profile. The threshold must be written before the action begins. Once written, it must be honored. If the threshold is met and the action proceeds anyway, the leadership group has chosen courage at the expense of the people it is supposed to protect.

Component 3. Protocols for handling provocation

Provocation protocols are most useful when they are simple. Participants under stress will not remember complex theory. They will remember a phrase, a hand

signal, a posture, and a named person. The action team should rehearse the most likely provocations before the action begins. Rehearsal is not theatrical. It is protection.

Provocation	Trigger	Decision-maker	Discipline markers
Agent provocateurs	Someone pushes participants toward violence, insults police, damages property, or demands reckless escalation.	Action commander after security lead input.	Hands visible. No retaliation. Sit or step back. Repeat agreed phrase. Observers move closer. Spokesperson uses holding line.
Planted violence	A violent act appears inside or near the action and may be designed to discredit the movement.	Action commander, with documentarian and observer support.	Separation. Documentation. Refusal of collective blame. Pause or withdraw if commander decides.
Undercover infiltration	Unknown participants seek sensitive details, redirect plans, or create distrust inside the team.	Security lead, in private channel.	Compartmentalization. Do not debate security in open channels. Verify quietly. Adjust access.
False flags	A fabricated event or fake account claims the movement committed violence or received foreign orders.	Spokesperson with action commander approval.	Short denial with verifiable anchors. Direct audience to official channels. Name next update time. Do not over-answer.
Kettling and arrest tactics	Security forces trap participants, block exits, split groups, or arrest selected leaders.	Action commander or security lead under emergency authority.	Activation of legal contacts and family liaison. Observer notes. Withdrawal if possible. Regroup point.
Sudden escalation	The regime changes posture quickly through force, threats, vehicles, weapons, or mass detentions.	Security lead under emergency authority, commander informed.	Safety first. No action objectively justifies preventable sacrifice once the protection plan is no longer adequate.
Family-based pressure during action	Relatives receive calls, threats, visits, or public exposure to force withdrawal or panic.	Family liaison, with commander authority to remove participant from visible role.	Affected participant moves out of public role. Private support activated. Reassessment of inside-country risk.

Component 4. Public message framework

The message framework protects the movement from rumor. The fastest message is often the least disciplined one. The goal is not to be first. The goal is to be credible, clear, and useful. The spokesperson should avoid speculation, exaggerated numbers, revenge language, and claims that cannot be verified. A movement that admits what it does not yet know is often more credible than a regime that claims to know everything.

Message field	What to fill in for your action
Action name	What is the action called? Use plain language that citizens can repeat.
Core demand	What specific change are you asking for, by whom, and by when?
Pre-action message for people inside the country	Why this action matters to families, dignity, safety, justice, and daily life.
Pre-action message for host country	Why this matters to law, asylum, public safety, democratic security, and local responsibility.
Pre-action message for international actors	What specific action you want from governments, parliaments, NGOs, media, or institutions.
During-action holding line	We are verifying reports. We will share confirmed facts only. Our commitment remains nonviolent discipline and protection of participants.
Post-action success message	What happened, what was achieved, whom to thank, and what comes next.
Post-action repression message	What happened, who was harmed, what you demand, and how allies can respond safely.
Post-action partial outcome message	What moved, what did not, and what the next step is.
Post-action unexpected escalation message	Verified facts only. Safety first. No speculation. Named next update time.
Disinformation response	Which false narrative do you expect, and what verified rebuttal will you use?

Component 5. Protection plan

The protection plan must include the person after the publicity ends. Movements often fail at care. They turn victims into symbols and then leave them alone with the consequences. That is morally wrong and strategically foolish. People remember who protected them after the cameras left.

Protection field	What to fill in for your action
Pre-action legal pathway	Name lawyers, arrest protocol, legal forms, rights briefing, and family notification system.
Pre-action medical pathway	Name first-aid volunteers, clinic routes, transport, medicines, and emergency contacts.
Pre-action mental-health pathway	Name peer support, post-action check-ins, quiet space, and referral options.
Pre-action family protection	Name who contacts families, what they are told, and how threats to families are reported.
Pre-action inside-country protection	Name red lines for publishing, source protection, and network shielding.
During-action protection	Name exit routes, regroup points, emergency signals, device posture, and who monitors escalation.
Post-action legal follow-up	Track detentions, summons, charges, hearings, and evidence delivery to counsel.
Post-action care follow-up	Track injuries, trauma signs, family needs, and long-tail harassment.
Documentation chain	Who stores evidence, where, under what access rules, and when it is reviewed.
Backfire conversion pathway	Which evidence becomes media, legal filing, sanctions material, diplomatic brief, or next campaign.

“The person comes before the campaign.”

Worked example. A prisoner-family vigil outside a foreign ministry

The example below is generic. It is not a description of a specific historical event. It shows how the five components work together for a small but visible action by exiled families and allied organizations.

Action purpose. Secure a meeting within thirty days between prisoner families and the foreign ministry, and deliver verified case files requesting targeted diplomatic pressure and emergency medical access for named prisoners.

Component	Filled example
Roles	Action commander: senior exile organizer. Backup: deputy from family committee. Spokesperson: one family member trained with holding lines. Documentarian: lawyer volunteer who records only public scene and preserves signed consent forms. Family liaison: pastor trusted by families.
Risks	Physical: medium, possible harassment by regime proxies. Legal: low to medium, permit rules and sidewalk restrictions. Digital: high, doxxing expected. Transnational: high, relatives inside may receive threats. Psychological: high, families may be retraumatized. Cancel threshold: credible threat against named family inside the country, or loss of permit with no safe alternative site.
Provocation protocols	If a provocateur insults police or damages property, observers move closer, spokesperson repeats: This is a peaceful family vigil. Commander instructs participants to sit or step back. Documentarian records only from safe angle. If family threats arrive during action, family liaison removes affected participant from visible role and activates private support.
Public message	Pre-action: Families ask for diplomatic pressure to secure medical access and humane treatment. During-action holding line: We are verifying reports and will share only confirmed facts. Post-action success: The ministry received the files and agreed to a meeting. Post-repression: Families were threatened for asking that prisoners be treated as human beings. We demand protection for relatives and immediate diplomatic follow-up.
Protection plan	Legal contact on call. Medical volunteer present. Digital team monitors doxxing. Families receive pre-action briefing on possible retaliation. Case files stored encrypted. After action, the team holds a private debrief, checks on relatives inside through secure channels, and sends a follow-up brief to legislators within forty-eight hours.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- > *What is the action you are planning now?*
- > *Can you fill all five components without guessing?*
- > *Which role or risk category remains weakest?*



SECTION V

Maintaining discipline under provocation

Provocation is not an interruption of the action. In authoritarian contexts, provocation is often part of the action environment. The regime may use agents, planted violence, infiltration, false flags, crowd control traps, sudden escalation, or family-based pressure. The goal is to produce panic, indiscipline, fracture, or a usable image against the movement. The answer is preparation.

The decision tree. Hold, withdraw, escalate, or convert

When provocation occurs, the action commander should not ask, how angry are we. The commander should ask four questions in order. First, can we hold discipline safely? If yes, hold. Second, is participant safety deteriorating beyond the agreed threshold? If yes, withdraw. Third, has the regime created a moment that requires immediate public escalation? If yes, escalate with verified facts only. Fourth, can the incident be converted into evidence, advocacy, or legal pressure after the action? If yes, convert.

Decision	When to use it	Who decides	What the spokesperson says
Hold	Provocation is visible but contained, and participants remain safe enough to continue.	Action commander after security lead input.	We remain disciplined. Our purpose has not changed.
Withdraw	Risk exceeds threshold, exits are closing, family threats intensify, or violence is likely.	Action commander or security lead under emergency authority.	We are ending the public action to protect participants. The demand remains.
Escalate	A verified act of repression occurs and public attention can protect victims or raise cost.	Action commander, spokesperson, and legal contact together.	Verified facts show repression against peaceful participants. We demand immediate protection and accountability.
Convert	Incident should not be litigated publicly in the moment but can support legal, diplomatic, or sanctions follow-up.	Documentarian and legal contact, with commander approval.	We are preserving evidence and will share verified information through appropriate channels.

Seven provocation protocols in practice

Each provocation has a visible marker, a recommended response, and a phrase the spokesperson can use without rehearsal. The phrases below are starting points. Adapt them to language, context, and regime narrative.

Agent provocateurs

Visible marker. Someone pushing violence, property damage, insults, or reckless confrontation. Response. Immediate distance, verbal discipline, and observer documentation. Participants should not debate the person. Spokesperson phrase. This action is peaceful. Anyone calling for violence does not speak for us.

Planted violence

Visible marker. Sudden violence appearing near the action in a way that benefits the regime narrative. Response. Separation, documentation, and refusal of collective blame. The commander may pause or withdraw. The documentarian preserves evidence but does not chase the incident into danger.

Undercover infiltration

Visible marker. Pressure for sensitive details, demands to change plans, attempts to identify sources, or sudden accusations against trusted people without evidence. Response. Compartmentalization. Do not debate security in open channels. Move the issue to the security lead and verify quietly.

False flags

Visible marker. A fake statement, fake account, fake image, or fabricated claim of violence. Response. A short denial with verifiable anchors. Do not over-answer. Say what the movement controls, where official messages appear, and when the next update will come.

Kettling and arrest tactics

Visible marker. Blocked exits, narrowing space, sudden separation of leaders, or selective arrests. Response. Activation of legal contacts, family liaison, observer notes, and withdrawal if possible. Participants should know in advance where to regroup and whom to call.

Sudden escalation

Visible marker. Weapons, mass detention, aggressive movement by police or militias, vehicles used as intimidation, or threats that exceed the planned risk. Response. Safety first. No action objective justifies preventable sacrifice when the protection plan is no longer adequate.

Family-based pressure during the action

Visible marker. A call, message, visit, threat, or public exposure directed at a participant's family. Response. Removal of the affected participant from public role, activation of family liaison, and reassessment of whether the action still protects those inside.

Security warning. Never allow the crowd to decide escalation by emotion. Escalation authority must be named before the action. If everyone can escalate, the regime only needs to provoke one person.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *Which provocation is most likely in your context?*
- › *What phrase will participants repeat to maintain visible discipline?*
- › *Who has authority to withdraw the action?*



SECTION VI

Documentation as strategic infrastructure

Documentation is not administrative work. It is one of the ways suffering becomes power without being exploited. When properly collected, protected, and converted, documentation can support legal defense, sanctions, media accountability, transitional justice, and historical memory. When handled carelessly, it can expose victims, compromise sources, and weaken credibility.

Every action should distinguish public testimony from confidential evidence. Public testimony is what a person consents to share with the public. Confidential evidence is material preserved for lawyers, accountability mechanisms, trusted investigators, or future proceedings. Never assume that because a person told you something, the person has consented to public use.

Minimum chain of custody

- Record who collected the evidence.
- Record when and where it was collected, using the safest level of location detail.
- Record the consent status.
- Store the original securely.
- Create a working copy for analysis.
- Limit access by role.

- Log every transfer.
- Decide what can be public, what must remain confidential, and what should not be stored at all.

Do-no-harm is the governing principle. Evidence that endangers a victim may need to be delayed, anonymized, summarized, or withheld. In closed contexts, exact dates, locations, and faces can be dangerous. A movement should prefer evidence that is useful and safe over evidence that is dramatic and reckless.

Security warning. Do not enter sensitive names, operational plans, addresses, contact lists, or unverified allegations into ordinary AI systems. Use only vetted tools under secure protocols. When uncertain, remove detail rather than add it.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *Who owns the evidence after the action?*
- › *What consent has been obtained?*
- › *What evidence would be dangerous if a device were seized?*



SECTION VII

The public message in practice

The public message is part of the action, not commentary after the action. It prepares participants, frames the moral meaning, reduces rumor, and tells allies exactly what to do. Marshall Ganz teaches that public narrative connects the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. Under authoritarianism, this narrative must also connect fear to agency. People need to know why the action matters, who is acting, what is being asked, and how they can respond safely.

Pre-action message

The pre-action message should be clear, brief, and rooted in dignity. It should name the issue, the demand, the nonviolent character of the action, and the audiences being asked to respond. It should not exaggerate. It should not promise outcomes the team cannot control.

Pre-action template. We are taking this action because [harm] violates the dignity and rights of [affected people]. We are asking [decision-maker] to [specific

action] by [date]. Our action is disciplined and nonviolent. We ask citizens, institutions, and allies to respond by [safe response].

During-action message held in reserve

The during-action message should be used only when necessary. It is a holding line for uncertainty. It prevents the spokesperson from speculating when arrests, violence, or rumors appear.

Holding line. We are verifying reports. We will share confirmed facts only. Our commitment remains nonviolent discipline, protection of participants, and accountability for any abuse. Our next update will come at [time] through [official channel].

Post-action messages

The post-action message depends on what happened. Prepare at least four scenarios in advance. Success, repression, partial outcome, and unexpected escalation.

Scenario	Message structure
Success	What happened, what changed, who acted, who is thanked, what comes next, and how supporters can continue.
Repression	Verified facts, harmed people protected by consent, specific demand, legal or diplomatic pathway, and safe action by allies.
Partial outcome	What moved, what did not move, why the action still matters, and the next step.
Unexpected escalation	Safety status, verified facts only, no speculation, next update time, and contact point for families or lawyers.

Three audiences

People inside the country need language that connects the action to daily dignity, safety, faith, family, work, and justice. The host country needs language that connects the action to law, asylum, local safety, democratic security, and the duty not to allow foreign dictatorships to export fear. International actors need specific asks. A hearing, a visa pathway, a sanctions review, a public statement, a legal filing, a meeting, a protection mechanism, or funding for care and defense.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *Can an ordinary citizen understand your message in thirty seconds?*
- › *What is your holding line if repression occurs before facts are verified?*
- › *What exact action do you want from international allies?*



SECTION VIII

Protection plan architecture

Protection begins before visibility. A movement that protects people only after repression has already accepted avoidable harm. The protection plan has three phases. Pre-action, during-action, and post-action. Each phase covers participants, families, inside-country networks, and the people who may be targeted because of association.

Pre-action protection

Before the action, the team should brief participants on risk, confirm consent, define roles, secure devices, establish legal contacts, identify medical pathways, prepare family communication, and decide which information is need-to-know. Participants should know the nonviolent discipline markers, the withdrawal signal, the regroup point, and the official communication channel.

During-action protection

During the action, the security lead monitors escalation, observers record regime behavior, the legal contact tracks detentions, the medical contact handles injuries, and the family liaison prevents rumor from becoming panic. The spokesperson does not chase every rumor. The action commander protects the sequence and makes decisions according to thresholds already agreed.

Post-action protection

After the action, danger often increases. The regime may retaliate after cameras leave. Employers may receive calls. Families may be threatened. Digital accounts may be attacked. Doxxing may begin. The team should run check-ins, preserve evidence, connect detained participants to lawyers, provide medical and psychological support, and watch for second-wave repression.

Resilience as operational architecture

Maradiaga's Theory of Resilience identifies five mechanisms that matter for leaders and teams under pressure. Self-regulation, threat management, trust, relational quality, and meaning-making. These are not slogans. They are operating capacities. Self-regulation prevents panic from becoming policy. Threat management distinguishes danger from noise. Trust holds the team when formal structures fail. Relational quality makes help available before crisis. Meaning-making connects suffering to purpose without romanticizing suffering.

Care principle. The person comes before the campaign. A victim, prisoner family, threatened participant, or survivor is never raw material for narrative. Consent, dignity, and care govern every public use of suffering.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *What happens to participants twenty-four hours after the action?*
- › *Who checks on families inside the country?*
- › *Which resilience mechanism is weakest in your team?*



SECTION IX

After-action review and strategic conversion

Every action should generate learning. If the team does not review what happened, the movement will repeat mistakes and forget what worked. The after-action review should happen within seventy-two hours while memory is fresh and before the next crisis consumes attention.

After-action review field	What to fill in
Action reviewed	One-line description of the action.
Original objective	What concrete result did we seek?
Expected outcome	What did we believe would happen?
Actual outcome	What happened, including unintended outcomes?
Regime response	What did the regime do, when, and how?
Public response	How did citizens, allies, and bystanders react?

After-action review field	What to fill in
Security incidents	What threats, arrests, digital attacks, or family pressure occurred?
What worked	Which elements should be repeated?
What failed	Which elements should stop?
What surprised us	What did we not predict?
Strategic conversion	What evidence, relationships, or momentum now becomes legal action, advocacy, sanctions, funding, care, or recruitment?
What remains confidential	What cannot be shared because it endangers people or future work?

Strategic conversion is the difference between an event and a campaign. A documented arrest may become a legal filing. A disciplined action under provocation may become a media story. A pattern of threats may become a transnational repression dossier. A well-run action may recruit new volunteers. A partial success may become the next pressure point. The debrief lead is responsible for turning this conversion into assignments with deadlines.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

- › *What is the next decision you want from an institution?*
- › *Who will receive the evidence?*
- › *What lesson can be shared safely with the WLC network?*



SECTION X

Adapting the plan to environments and lanes of pressure

The same five-component Action Plan must be adapted to the operating environment. The doctrine does not change, but the weighting changes. In a closed dictatorship, protection and compartmentalization may dominate. In exile, the main challenge may be legitimacy, inside-outside coordination, and transnational repression. In a hybrid regime, the action may combine legal avenues, public messaging, and institutional pressure. In a transitional opening, the greatest danger may be the false belief that repression is over. The action planner should identify

the environment before designing the action, then ask which component of the plan deserves the greatest attention.

Inside a closed dictatorship

The first discipline is minimal exposure. Public visibility may be useful only when it has protective value or when the moral contrast can be carried safely by external channels. Many actions will be low-profile, distributed, civic in appearance, and built around the preservation of trust. The action commander should avoid centralizing information. The documentarian should preserve evidence in forms that do not expose sources. The spokesperson may be outside the country, while inside actors remain unnamed. The risk threshold for canceling or postponing should be lower than in semi-open contexts because the regime may punish not only participants but also families, employers, churches, schools, and neighbors. In such contexts, the highest form of discipline may be restraint. Acting only when the action has a purpose, protection, and a conversion path.

In exile-coordinated actions

The principal discipline is the Umbilical Cord. Exiles can speak when those inside cannot, but they must not speak over those inside. The action plan must define what is decided inside, what is decided abroad, who authorizes public claims, and what details cannot be released. The family liaison role becomes especially sensitive because families inside the country may absorb retaliation for speech delivered abroad. The public message should communicate that exile is service, not substitution. The protection plan should include host-country threats, surveillance, harassment by regime proxies, online abuse, legal intimidation, and pressure against relatives at home. Exile is useful when it produces verifiable decisions. Visas, hearings, sanctions review, legal filings, funding for families, media corrections, and protection pathways.

In hybrid regimes

The planner should use legal space without trusting it naively. A permit may reduce risk, but it may also create a participant list. A court filing may open a channel, but it may also expose lawyers. A media interview may spread the message, but it may trigger smear campaigns. Hybrid regimes specialize in ambiguity. They allow enough participation to claim openness and repress selectively enough to teach fear. The action plan should therefore connect public action with institutional follow-up. If the action is about electoral integrity, it should connect observers, legal teams, media verification, party witnesses, and international contacts. If the action is about prisoners, it should connect family testimony, medical evidence, diplomatic

pressure, and legal pathways. Never allow the regime to reduce the action to theater inside a controlled arena.

In transitional openings

The danger is different. People may relax too soon. Repression may become less visible but more selective. Old elites may shift from open coercion to procedural delay. The movement may confuse an opening with a transition, and a transition with consolidation. Maradiaga’s Theory of Democratic Conformism warns that societies can settle into a comfortable but incomplete plateau. Action design in this phase should protect the reform clock. Every action should ask what institutional reform it advances. Does it protect judicial independence? Does it defend electoral integrity? Does it prevent revenge while preserving accountability? Does it keep political prisoners and victims at the center? Does it prepare the public for the difficult reforms that arrive after the first celebration? In transitional moments, nonviolent discipline means refusing triumphalism as much as refusing vengeance.

The three lanes of pressure

A disciplined action rarely operates in only one lane. The WLC approach encourages movements to connect governmental and parliamentary pressure, multilateral or legal action, and societal or market pressure. The five-component Action Plan helps the team keep these lanes connected without confusing them. The same incident may require a public message for citizens, a confidential memo for legislators, a legal annex for lawyers, and a protection request for a city or university. Those products should not be improvised after the fact.

Pressure lane	Best use	Action-planning requirement
Governmental and parliamentary	Hearings, sanctions, visas, budget lines, protective statements, diplomatic pressure.	One-page brief, draft language, named owner, deadline, follow-up schedule.
Multilateral and legal	Urgent appeals, precautionary measures, legal filings, accountability records.	Verified evidence, consent, chain of custody, legal theory, confidentiality rules.
Societal and market	Newsroom standards, university support, faith networks, labor solidarity, technology protection, city action.	Audience-specific ask, trusted messenger, public narrative, measurable commitment.

Governmental and parliamentary pressure requires precise asks. A legislator can rarely act on grief alone. The action team should offer draft language, a case

summary, a legal basis, names of responsible institutions where safe, and a deadline. A public action that asks for everything may produce applause and no decision. A public action that asks for one hearing, one letter, one visa pathway, one sanctions review, or one budget line gives allies something to do.

Multilateral and legal pressure requires evidentiary discipline. A rapporteur, court, commission, sanctions office, or treaty body needs facts organized in a form that can survive scrutiny. This means separating what is known, what is alleged, what is corroborated, and what remains confidential. It means resisting the temptation to publish all evidence publicly when a confidential pathway may be more protective or more effective.

Societal and market pressure requires translation. Universities, unions, churches, professional associations, investors, journalists, artists, sports bodies, and city councils do not all speak the same institutional language. The core message should remain consistent, but the ask must be adapted. A bar association may support detained lawyers. A medical association may help torture survivors. A church may protect families. A technology company may preserve accounts or resist takedowns. A city may create safe-harbor pathways. Translation is not dilution. It is how truth travels.

The discipline of timing

Timing is not a calendar question only. It is a power question. A statement delivered before evidence is ready may be ignored or discredited. A protest held after fear has peaked may expose fewer people but recruit poorly. A private diplomatic briefing before public escalation may prepare allies. A public escalation before private briefing may force allies to respond. None of these choices is always right. The action team must decide based on objective, risk, evidence, and expected regime response.

A useful timing discipline is the sequence of private preparation, controlled public action, and institutional conversion. First, prepare the evidence, roles, protection, and messages. Second, act publicly only to the degree that publicity advances the objective. Third, convert immediately into institutional steps. Many movements reverse the order. They act publicly first, try to organize evidence later, and then ask institutions to care after the media cycle has moved on. That sequence exhausts the movement and teaches allies that the movement has passion but not architecture.

When to postpone

Postponement is not defeat when it protects the movement's capacity to act again. The team should postpone when the objective is unclear, when a key role has no

backup, when legal counsel is unavailable for a high-arrest action, when family threats cross a pre-set threshold, when evidence is not verified, when security conditions change faster than the team can adapt, or when participants do not understand the risks they are accepting. Postponement becomes weakness only when it is a disguised way of avoiding necessary action. When it is the result of disciplined risk judgment, it is a form of strategic maturity.

The action commander should communicate postponement with clarity. Do not say the action failed. Say the team is preserving participants, strengthening the plan, and maintaining the demand. The message should not reveal vulnerabilities. It should communicate purpose, restraint, and continuity. A dictatorship wants opponents to treat delay as humiliation. Mature movements treat delay as a decision.

When to proceed

Proceed when the action has a clear objective, the roles are assigned, the risk is understood, the participants have consented, the provocation protocols are rehearsed, the public message is ready, the protection plan is active, and the conversion pathway exists. Proceed when the expected strategic value justifies the exposure. Proceed when the action builds power, not only emotion. Proceed when you can explain, to a frightened parent or an exhausted citizen, why this action matters and how the movement has tried to protect the people involved.

The final decision is never purely technical. It requires judgment. Heifetz reminds us that adaptive leadership means helping people face hard realities without offering false comfort. The action commander may need to tell an eager team that it is not ready. The commander may also need to tell a fearful team that the moment has arrived. Both decisions require moral seriousness. Neither should be made alone.

“Strategy is the disciplined relationship between purpose, capacity, risk, timing, and learning.”



SECTION XI

The pre-action discipline

Before an action proceeds, the leadership group should run the pre-action discipline. This is not a bureaucratic ritual. It is the last opportunity to discover that the action depends on assumptions no one has tested. The discipline has three

parts. The action readiness test, the minimum field card, and the participant briefing with inside-country network check.

The action readiness test

The test should be conducted aloud, with the action commander, security lead, legal contact, spokesperson, documentarian, family liaison, and debrief lead present. Each person should have permission to say no. A culture that punishes hesitation will miss the warning that matters. A culture that treats caution as cowardice will eventually sacrifice people unnecessarily.

Readiness question	Ready standard	If not ready
Can we state the action objective in one sentence?	Every lead can repeat the same objective.	Rewrite the objective before proceeding.
Do all nine roles have names and backups?	No operational role depends on one person alone.	Assign backups or redesign the action.
Have all nine risk categories been assessed?	Each category has likelihood, severity, mitigation, and threshold.	Complete risk canvas and review thresholds.
Do participants understand nonviolent discipline markers?	Participants know posture, phrase, signal, and withdrawal instruction.	Rehearse before action or reduce action size.
Is there a written provocation protocol?	Seven provocation categories have decision-maker and communication chain.	Complete protocol before public action.
Is the public message ready for four scenarios?	Success, repression, partial outcome, and escalation messages exist.	Draft and approve messages.
Is evidence collection safe?	Consent, storage, access, and chain of custody are defined.	Limit documentation or delay action.
Are families protected?	Family liaison has contact tree, risk notes, and escalation plan.	Do not proceed with visible roles until family risk is addressed.
Is post-action care assigned?	Legal, medical, mental-health, and family follow-up have owners.	Assign care owners before action.
Is there a conversion pathway?	The action has a next institutional target.	Define the decision you want after the action.

A team that answers no to several readiness questions should not interpret that as failure. It has received intelligence about itself. The action may need to shrink, move, delay, become private, shift to exile channels, or change its purpose. Strategy is not stubbornness. Strategy is the disciplined relationship between purpose, capacity, risk, timing, and learning.

The minimum field card

Every participant should receive a short field card, physical or memorized, adapted to the risk environment. The field card is not the full plan. It is the minimum information a participant needs if devices fail, panic spreads, or the team is separated. In high-risk contexts, the safest field card may be memorized rather than written. In lower-risk contexts, it can be printed without sensitive names. The field card should never include inside-country sources, full contact trees, legal strategy, or sensitive operational details.

Field card element	What participants should know
Purpose	One sentence explaining the action and the demand.
Discipline phrase	A short phrase participants repeat under provocation.
Emergency signal	The word, gesture, or instruction that means pause, withdraw, or regroup.
Regroup point	Where to go if separated, using safe and non-sensitive location language.
Legal contact method	How to reach legal help without exposing the full legal network.
Family contact method	How families will be notified, and who notifies them.
Official channel	Where verified updates will appear.
Do not do list	Do not speculate. Do not share unverified images. Do not confront provocateurs. Do not expose others.

The participant briefing and inside-country network check

Before an action, participants need a briefing that is honest without being paralyzing. Do not hide risk to preserve morale. False confidence collapses quickly when repression begins. Explain the objective, the expected risks, the nonviolent discipline rules, the withdrawal threshold, the role of observers, the documentation rules, and the care plan. Participants should know that choosing not to take a visible

role is not betrayal. A movement needs visible participants, but it also needs drivers, translators, note-takers, family contacts, food providers, designers, lawyers, medics, and people who pray, listen, translate, and hold the line from safer places.

The briefing should also name what the action is not. It is not a spontaneous confrontation. It is not an invitation to insult security forces. It is not a test of personal bravery. It is not a place to settle internal political disputes. It is not a space for unapproved banners, slogans, weapons, fireworks, or tactics that change the risk profile for everyone else. If participants want to take a different action, they should organize a different action with its own plan. They should not alter this one during execution.

Actions designed in exile or in safer cities should include an inside-country network check. The check asks whether the public action might expose people who are not present. A statement abroad may cause police visits at home. A photo may reveal a relative. A prisoner-family campaign may worsen prison conditions if not coordinated with lawyers and families. A sanctions request may trigger asset retaliation against relatives. These risks do not necessarily mean the action should stop. They do mean inside actors must be consulted where possible, risk must be weighed honestly, and details must be reduced when they are not essential.

The network check should be conducted by someone other than the most enthusiastic advocate for the action. Enthusiasm is valuable, but it can narrow vision. Assign a red-team reviewer whose task is to ask what the regime would do with every detail made public. The reviewer should ask. Who can be identified, who can be punished, what data is collected, what narrative can be twisted, and what would happen if a device or document is seized? The reviewer is not an obstacle to courage. The reviewer is a guardrail for the people who cannot afford our mistakes.

The last question before proceeding is simple. Can we protect the people who trusted us with enough seriousness that we would defend the decision in front of their families? If the answer is no, redesign. If the answer is yes, proceed with humility. No manual can remove danger from authoritarian struggle. A manual can help a team refuse unnecessary danger, name necessary risk honestly, and act with the discipline that keeps a movement worthy of the freedom it seeks.

The quiet minute. Before the action begins, the lead team should take sixty seconds without phones, noise, or speeches. Each lead confirms one sentence: my role, my backup, my threshold, my first call if something goes wrong. This small practice prevents many large failures. It reminds the team that courage is not a mood. It is a responsibility organized in advance.



SECTION XII

Three roles examined in depth

Three roles deserve closer treatment because they hold the operational architecture of the action. The action commander, the spokesperson, and the documentarian. Each carries a discipline that is easy to describe and difficult to practice. Each can be the difference between an action that builds power and an action that produces only noise.

The action commander

The action commander is not the owner of the movement. The commander is the temporary guardian of sequence. During the action, the commander protects the purpose from panic, the participants from unnecessary exposure, and the team from improvisation. This role requires a calm temperament, not theatrical charisma. The commander should be able to receive bad information without transmitting anxiety. The commander should listen to the security lead, legal contact, and family liaison before deciding to continue, pause, withdraw, or convert.

The commander should not also be the main spokesperson unless the team is very small and the risk is low. Combining command and public voice creates a single point of failure. If the commander is arrested, the message collapses. If the spokesperson is provoked, the operational sequence suffers. Separate the roles whenever possible. In high-risk settings, the commander may remain invisible while the spokesperson carries the visible message. This is not cowardice. It is role discipline.

The spokesperson

The spokesperson's task is not to express every emotion the movement feels. The task is to preserve truth under pressure. The spokesperson should know the action objective, the facts that are verified, the facts that remain unverified, the nonviolent discipline doctrine, and the next institutional ask. A good spokesperson never fills silence with speculation. A good spokesperson can say, we do not know yet, without sounding weak. Authoritarian regimes rely on confusion. The spokesperson's discipline is one of the ways the movement refuses confusion.

The spokesperson should practice four sentences before every action. First. Why we are here. Second. What we are asking for. Third. What we will not do. Fourth. What others can do safely. These sentences should be plain enough to survive translation,

stress, editing, and hostile questions. If the action cannot be explained without jargon, it is not ready for the public it hopes to persuade.

The documentarian

The documentarian must resist two temptations. The first is to record everything. The second is to publish quickly. Recording everything may expose faces, routes, license plates, relatives, or inside-country contacts. Publishing quickly may destroy a legal pathway or reveal a source. The documentarian's discipline is selectivity. The question is not, what can we capture? The question is, what evidence do we need, for what purpose, under what consent, and with what storage plan?

In some cases, the safest documentation is written. Time, place, officer unit if visible, sequence of events, witnesses, injuries, words spoken, arrests, and names of those who consent to be named. In other cases, video matters. In still other cases, the best evidence is a medical report, court document, threatening message, or financial record. The form should follow the intended use. A media story, a legal defense, a sanctions dossier, and a human-rights report do not require identical evidence packages.

Care, not spectacle

The movement must decide, before the action, how it will care for people after visibility. This includes those arrested, injured, threatened, doxxed, humiliated, or retraumatized. It also includes those who feel shame because they froze, withdrew, cried, or could not finish their role. Authoritarian systems are designed to produce fear, and fear produces human reactions. The movement should not punish people for being human under conditions designed to break them.

Care is also strategic. Families who know the movement will not abandon them are more likely to trust future actions. Lawyers who receive organized files are more likely to help again. Doctors who are treated with discretion are more willing to remain available. Participants who are contacted after the action become more resilient. Care builds the social capital that future discipline requires. Without care, each action spends trust. With care, each action can build it.



SECTION XIII

Practical exercises for the World Liberty Academy

The following exercises are designed for World Liberty Academy workshops, country-team retreats, exile-inside coordination sessions, and action-planning trainings. Each exercise produces a deliverable that can be used in a real action.

Exercise 1. Role assignment drill

Learning objective. Participants learn that every action needs named responsibility and succession. Instructions. Present a hypothetical action. Ask the group to assign all nine roles and backups in fifteen minutes. Then remove three key roles and ask the group to continue the plan. Deliverable. A completed roles table with succession.

Exercise 2. Nine-category risk map

Learning objective. Participants learn to identify risks beyond physical arrest. Instructions. Divide into small groups. Assign each group three risk categories. They identify likelihood, severity, mitigation, and cancel thresholds. Deliverable. A consolidated risk table.

Exercise 3. Provocation simulation

Learning objective. Participants practice discipline under pressure. Instructions. One team acts as the movement. Another acts as the regime. The regime introduces provocation every five minutes. The movement must decide hold, withdraw, escalate, or convert. Deliverable. Revised provocation protocols.

Exercise 4. Message discipline lab

Learning objective. Participants learn to communicate verified facts without speculation. Instructions. Give the spokesperson incomplete information about a reported arrest. The spokesperson must issue a holding line and refuse rumor. Deliverable. Pre-action, during-action, and post-action messages.

Exercise 5. Evidence chain practice

Learning objective. Participants learn chain of custody and consent. Instructions. Provide sample evidence items. Participants decide what is public, confidential, unsafe to store, or ready for legal review. Deliverable. Evidence classification sheet.

Exercise 6. Protection-before-action drill

Learning objective. Participants learn that protection is a condition of action readiness. Instructions. Ask the team to plan an action, then remove host-country media access, independent courts, or safe banking. They must redesign protection. Deliverable. Revised protection plan.

Exercise 7. Backfire analysis

Learning objective. Participants learn the six conditions of backfire. Instructions. Present a repression incident. Participants identify which backfire conditions exist and which are missing. Deliverable. Conversion plan from abuse to pressure.

Exercise 8. After-action review practice

Learning objective. Participants learn to convert experience into strategy. Instructions. Use a past action, anonymized as needed. Fill out the AAR canvas and produce three changes for the next action. Deliverable. Written AAR and next-stage assignments.



SECTION XIV

Patterns to recognize. Failure modes and case studies

Patterns repeat across movements. Knowing them in advance helps the team recognize them before they damage the action. The first set is the failure modes that occur within actions. The second is the verified case patterns from the WLC network.

Common failure modes

Failure mode	What it looks like	Correction
Panic	The team reacts to rumors, changes plans in public channels, or lets fear decide sequence.	Use holding lines, verify facts, and return to the commander and security lead.
Romanticization of sacrifice	Leaders treat arrest or injury as proof of seriousness.	Ask whether the risk advances the objective and whether participants consented.
Abandonment after publicity	A family or victim is visible during the campaign and forgotten afterward.	Assign care follow-up and track it as part of success.
Exposure without consent	Names, images, locations, or stories are published without permission.	Require consent review before publication.
Escalation under emotion	Anger after provocation determines the next move.	Use the hold, withdraw, escalate, or convert decision tree.
Single-spokesperson	One person carries all visibility and becomes the obvious target.	Rotate spokespeople and prepare written statements.

Failure mode	What it looks like	Correction
dependence		
Missing succession	The action collapses if the commander, spokesperson, or security lead is removed.	Name backups and emergency authority.
No after-action review	The team moves to the next action without learning.	Schedule AAR before the action begins.
Unclear international ask	Allies express sympathy but no decision follows.	Convert the message into a specific request with deadline and owner.
No protection for families	The action protects public participants but ignores relatives inside.	Include family-risk mapping in every plan.

The most dangerous failure mode is not always visible. It is the quiet lowering of ambition after repeated struggle. Maradiaga's Theory of Democratic Conformism explains how systems settle into a sufficiently tolerable but insufficiently free plateau. Movements can experience a similar exhaustion trap before transition. They begin by seeking transformation, then settle into survival. The antidote is not reckless escalation. It is disciplined renewal. Rotate leadership, train successors, rest without retreat, restate maximum demands, and build ninety-day projects that produce measurable progress.

Verified patterns from the WLC case library

The manual avoids invented case material. The purpose of case use here is not storytelling for its own sake. Cases help planners recognize patterns before those patterns reach their own teams. A case should never become a recipe. It should become a diagnostic mirror. What was the operating environment, what did the regime do, what did the movement control, what did it fail to control, and what should a peer movement prepare differently?

Pattern 1. Leadership selection as a repression target. The Nicaraguan electoral crisis of 2021 shows one of the hardest lessons for action planners. In a rapidly closing dictatorship, the regime may treat leadership selection itself as the target. The lesson for this manual is not that movements should avoid leadership selection. The lesson is that selection processes require succession, protected consultation, legal rapid response, external warning, and a plan for arrests before names become visible. If the action creates a map of leadership that the regime can decapitate, the plan must be redesigned. Beyond elections, this pattern

matters for any public action. The person holding the microphone, the person coordinating families, the person carrying files to diplomats, and the person managing volunteers may all become targets. The roles canvas therefore asks not only who leads, but who replaces them. Succession is not an abstract governance issue. It is an anti-decapitation practice.

Pattern 2. Public mandate and repression risk. The Venezuelan opposition primary of 2023 illustrates a different pattern. A leadership-selection process can reveal hidden social energy, clarify a mandate, and force a regime into a reactive position. It can also create data risks, retaliation risks, disqualification scenarios, and a need for post-process unity. The lesson for action design is that participation is power only when the movement protects participants and knows what comes after participation. For WLC members, this case pattern applies to any action that asks citizens to step forward. A public signature, a vote, a vigil, a march, a testimony, a donation, or a visible act of solidarity can create legitimacy. It can also create lists. The action planner should ask what information is collected, who holds it, how it is protected, and what happens if the regime demands it. The best action may be the one that demonstrates support while collecting less personal data.

Pattern 3. Exile as frontline, not substitute. The WLC Freedom in Exile doctrine teaches that exile becomes leverage only when it remains connected to those inside. Exiles can carry testimony, evidence, advocacy, and international access. They can also become disconnected if they speak without consultation, expose people inside, or allow host-country politics to distort the domestic struggle. The lesson for action design is that every exile-led action needs an inside-outside compact. The compact does not need to be long. It needs to answer operational questions. Who authorizes the message, what details are too dangerous, how families will be protected, who receives credit, who speaks if someone is arrested, what international ask is connected to inside priorities, and what happens if those inside ask exiles to delay. In exile actions, discipline means resisting the temptation to convert distance into overconfidence.

Pattern 4. Transnational repression as cumulative pressure. The Playbook's treatment of transnational repression emphasizes that exile is not automatic safety. Threats, online harassment, family pressure, false legal claims, surveillance, and proxy intimidation can accumulate over time. Often the strategy is not one dramatic attack. It is the slow creation of fear, exhaustion, reputational damage, and legal distraction. The action plan should treat transnational repression as an expected risk category, not as an exceptional event. This affects every component. Roles must include a family liaison. Risks must include relatives, host-country safety, and digital exposure. Provocation protocols must

anticipate proxy harassment and false accusations. Public messages must avoid giving hostile actors extra identifying details. Protection must include host-country legal contacts, platform reporting channels, digital hygiene, and a way to document low-grade incidents before they become a pattern no one can reconstruct.



SECTION XV

Notes for World Liberty Academy facilitators

When teaching this manual, do not begin with theory alone. Begin with a real action participants are considering. Ask them to describe it in one sentence, then immediately ask who could be harmed. This changes the room. It reminds participants that operational seriousness begins with duty of care. After that, introduce the five-component Action Plan as a tool that protects both courage and purpose.

Trainers should also watch for hidden hierarchy. In many movements, the most visible leader dominates planning even when others understand risk better. In workshops, require the security lead, legal contact, documentarian, and family liaison to speak before the final decision. This models the culture the action needs. Repression exploits unspoken hierarchy. Good planning makes responsibility visible.

A useful training rhythm is three rounds. Round one. Build the plan quickly. Round two. Let a regime-response team attack the plan with likely provocations. Round three. Redesign the plan using what was learned. Participants usually discover that their first plan was too public, too centralized, too dependent on one spokesperson, too vague in its demand, or too weak in post-action care. That discovery is the value of the exercise.

The final exercise should always be the conversion pathway. Ask participants what institution, person, or process should move after the action. If they cannot answer, the action may be expressive but not strategic. The goal of WLC Academy training is not to produce braver people. The people are already brave. The goal is to help brave people build the architecture that keeps them in the struggle, protects those who trust them, and turns action into cumulative democratic power.



CONCLUSION

Discipline that protects, action that builds power

Nonviolent discipline is not a decoration placed on action after strategy has been designed. It is the design. It shapes who participates, how they are protected, how provocation is handled, how truth is preserved, how the public understands the moment, and how repression becomes cost rather than silence.

The five-component Action Plan is deliberately practical. Roles prevent chaos. Risk assessment prevents blindness. Provocation protocols prevent the regime from writing the story. Public messaging prevents rumor from replacing truth. Protection plans prevent people from being used and then forgotten. Together, they allow courage to act with architecture.

The goal is not to suffer well. The goal is to fight wisely, protect faithfully, document carefully, speak truthfully, and prepare the next step. The action is never only the action. It is a test of the movement we are becoming.

Discipline is how courage protects the vulnerable.

Documentation is how suffering becomes evidence.

Protection is how movements honor the people who trust them.

Strategy is how action survives repression.

Freedom is defended by people who refuse both fear and vengeance.

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