

## Lawrence, T.E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Book III  
Chapter 35  
Strategy and Tactics

I spent about ten days lying in that tent, suffering a bodily weakness which made my animal self crawl and hide till the shame was passed. As usually in such circumstances my mind cleared, and my senses became more acute, and I began at last to think countinuously of the Arab Revolt, as an accustomed thing to rest upon against the pain. It should have been thought out long before, but at my first landing in Hejaz there had been a crying need for action, and we had just done what seemed to instinct best, without probing into the why, or formulating what we really wanted at the end of all. Instinct so abused, without its basis of past knowledge and reflection, had grown merely feminine, and was now destroying my confidence: so I snatched the opportunity of this forced idleness to look for the equation between my book-reading and my movements, and spent the intervals of my uneasy sleeps and dreams plucking at the tangle of our present.

As I have shown, I was unfortunately as much in command of the campaign as I pleased, and was untrained. In military theory I was tolerably read, my Oxford curiosity having taking me past Napoleon to Clausewitz and his school, to Caemmerer and Moltke, Goltz and the recent Frenchmen. They had seemed partial books, and after looking at Jomini and Willisen I had found broader principles in Saxe and Guibert and the eighteenth century. However, Clausewitz intellectually so much the master of them all, and his book so logical and fascinating that unconsciously I had accepted his finality until a comparison of Khune and Foch had disgusted me with soldiers, made me weary of their officious glory, critical of all their light. In any case my interest had been abstract, concerned with the philosophy and theory of warfare, especially from its metaphysical side.

Now in the field everything had been concrete, especially the tiresome problem of Medina, and to distract myself from that, I began to recall suitable maxims on the conduct of warfare: but they would not fit, and worried me. Hitherto Medina had been an obsession for us all: but now that I was ill, whether it was that we were near to it (one seldom liked attainable) or whether it was that my eyes were misty with too constant staring – but anyway its image was not clear. One afternoon I woke out of a hot sleep, running with sweat and pricking with flies, and wondered what on earth was the good of Medina to us? Its harmfulness when we were at Yenbo had been patent – the Turks in it were going to Mecca: but we had changed all that by our march to Wejh. Today we are blockading the railway and they only defending it. The garrison of Medina, reduced to an inoffensive size, were sitting in trenches, destroying their own power of movement by eating the transport they could no longer feed. We had taken away their power to harm us, and yet wanted to take away their town. Its was not a base for us like Wejh, or a threat like Wadi Ais. What on earth did we want it for?

The camp was bestirring itself after the long torpor of the midday hours, and noises began to filter in to me from the world outside, through the yellow lining of canvas, whose every hole and tear was stabbed through by a long dagger of sunlight. I heard the stamping and snorting of the horses plagued with flies where they stood in the shadow of the trees, the complaint of camels, the ringing of coffee mortars, distant shots. To their burden I began to drum out the aim in war. The books gave it

to me pat – the destruction of the armed forces of the enemy by the one process – the battle. Victory could be purchased only by blood. This was a hard saying for us, as the Arabs has no organised forces. A Turkish Foch would have no aim? The Arabs would not endure casualties... how would our Clausewitz buy his victory? Von der Goltz had seemed to go deeper when he said that it was necessary not to annihilate the enemy but to break his courage, only we showed no prospect of ever breaking anybody's courage.

However, Goltz was a humbug, and these wise men must be talking metaphors, for we were indubitably winning our war: and as I pondered, it dawned on me that we had won the Hejaz War. Out of every thousand squares miles of Hejaz nine hundred and ninety-nine were now free, and it came yet clearer to me that this was a rebellion: more like peace than like war, as Vickery had provoked me to say. Perhaps in war the absolute did rule: but for peace a majority was good enough. If we held the rest, the Turks were welcome to the tiny fraction on which they stood, till peace or Doomsday showed them the futility of clinging to our window pane.

I brushed off the same flies form my face patiently, content to know that the Hejaz war was won and practically finished with: had been won from the day we took Wejh if we had had the wit to see it. Then I broke the thread of my argument again to listen. Those distant shots had grown and tied themselves into long ragged volleys. They ceased. I strained my ears for the other sounds which I knew would follow: and sure enough across the silence came a rustle like the dragging of a skirt over the flints, all around the thin walls of my tent. Then a moment's pause, while the camel-riders drew up: and then the soggy tapping of their canes on the thick of their beasts' necks to make them kneel.

They knelt without noise, and I timed it in my memory: first the hesitation, as the camels looking down felt the soil with one foot for a soft place: then the muffled thud and the sudden loosening of breath as they dropped on their foreleg, since this party had come far and their camels were tired: then the shuffle as the hind legs were folded in, and the rocking as they tossed from side to side thrusting outward with their knees to bury them in the cooler subsoil below the burning flints, while their riders, with a quick soft patter of bare feet like birds over the ground, were led off tacitly either to the coffee hearth, or to Abdulla's tent, according to their business. The camels would rest there, uneasily switching their tails across the shingle till their masters remembered and looked to them.

I had made a comfortable beginning of doctrine, but was left still to find an alternative end and means of war. Ours seemed unlike the ritual which Foch was priest, and I recalled him, to see a difference in kind between him and us. In his modern war – *absolute* war, he called it – two nations professing incompatible philosophies put them to the test of force. Philosophically it was idiotic, for while opinions were arguable, convictions, to cure them, needed shooting: and the struggle could end only when the supporters of one immaterial principle had no more means of resistance against the supporters of the other. It sounded like a twentieth-century restatement of the early wars of religion, whose logical end was the final destruction of one creed.

This might do for France and Germany, but did not represent the british attitude. Our army was not intelligently maintaining a philosophic conception in Flanders or on the Canal. Efforts to make our man hate the enemy usually made them hate figthing. Indeed Foch had knocked out his own argument by saying that such war depended on levy in mass, and was impossible with professional armies: while the old army was still the British ideal, and its manner the ambition of our ranks and our files. To me the Foch war seemed only one variety, no more absolute than other. One could as explicably call it

'murder war'. Clausewitz had enumerated all sorts of wars... personal wars, joint-proxy duels, for dynastic reasons... expulsive wars, in party politics... commercial wars, for trade objects.... Two wars seemed seldom alike. Sometimes the parties did not know their aim, and blundered till the march of events took control. Victory often leaned to the clear-sighted, though fortune and superior intelligence had sadly muddled nature's inexorable law.

So I wondered why Feisal wanted to fight the Turks, and why the Arabs help him, and saw that their aim was geographical, to extrude the Turk from all Arabic-speaking land in Asia. Their peace ideal of liberty could exercise itself only in that condition after the process. On the way we might kill Turks: we dislike them very much: but the killing was a accidental. If they would go quietly the war would end. If not we would urge them, or try to drive them out. In the last resort we would be compelled to the desperate course of blood, and the maxims of 'murder war', but as cheaply as could be for ourselves, since the Arabs fought for freedom, and that was a pleasure to be tasted only by a man alive. Posterity was a chilly thing to work for, however a man happened to love his own, or other people's already-produced children.

At this point a slave slapped my tent-door and asked if the Emir might call. So I struggled into some clothes, and crawled over to his great tent to sound the depth of motive in him. It was a comfortable place, kept luxuriously shaded and carpeted deep in bad rugs, the aniline-dyed spoils of Hussein Mabeirig's house in Rabegh. Abdulla passed most of his day in it, laughing with his friends, and playing wild games with Mohammed Hassan the court jester. I set the ball of conversation rolling between him and Shakir and the chance sheikhs, among whom was the fire-hearted Ferhan al Aida, son of Doughty's friend Motlog: and was rewarded, for Abdulla's words were definite. He emphasised his hearers' present independence compared with their past servitude to Turkey, and roundly said that this talk of Turkish heresy, or of the illegitimate Caliphate, was beside the point. It was Arab country, and the Turks were in it: that was the one issue. My argument preened itself.

The next day a great complication of boils showed itself, to conceal my lessened fever, and to chain me down yet longer in impotence upon my face in this stifling tent. When it grew too hot for dreamless dozing I picked up my tangle again, and went on ravelling it out, considering now the whole house of war in its structural aspect, which was strategy, in its outward arrangements, which were tactics, and in the sentiment of its inhabitants, which was psychology: for my personal duty was command, and the commander, like the master architect, was responsible for all.

The first confusion was the false antithesis between strategy, the aim in war, the synoptic regard seeing each part in relation to the whole, and tactics, the means towards the strategic end, the particular steps of the staircase. They seemed only two points of view, from which to consider the elements of war, the algebraical element of things, the biological element of lives, and the psychological element of ideas. The algebraical element looked to be a pure science, subject to mathematical law, inhuman. It dealt with known invariables, fixed conditions, space and time, inorganic things like hills and climates and railways, with mankind in type masses too great for individual variety, with all artificial aids and the extensions given our faculties by mechanical invention. It was essentially formulable.

Here was a pompous beginning, and my wits, hostile to the abstract, took refuge in Arabia again. In the Arab case the algebraic factor would first take practical account of the area we wished to deliver, and I began idly to calculate how many squares miles... sixty, eighty, one hundred... perhaps one

hundred and forty thousand square miles. And how would the Turks defend all that?... No doubt by a trench line across the bottom, if we came like an army with banners... but suppose we were (as we might be) an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, invulnerable, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile as a whole, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind, and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so we might offer nothing material to the killing. It seemed a regular soldier might be helpless without a target, owning only on what he sat, and at what he could poke his rifle.

Then I figure out how many men they would need to sit on all this ground, to save it from our attack in depth, sedition putting up her head in every unoccupied one of those hundred thousand square miles. I knew the Turkish Army exactly, and even allowing for their recent extension of faculty by aeroplanes and guns and armoured trains (which made the earth a smaller battlefield) still seemed they would have need of a fortified post every four square miles, and a post could not be less than twenty men. If so they would need six hundred thousand men to meet the ill-wills of all the Arab Peoples, combined with the active hostility of a few zealots.

How many zealots could we have? At present we had nearly fifty thousand: sufficient for the day. It seemed the assets in this element of war were ours. If we realised our raw materials and were apt with them, the climate, the railways, deserts, and technical weapons could also be attached to our interests. The Turks were stupid, the Germans behind them dogmatical. They would believe that rebellion was absolute like war, and deal with it on the analogy of war. Analogy in human things was fudge, anyhow: and to make war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.

This was enough of the concrete, so I sheered of *επιστημη* – the mathematical element – and plunged into the nature of the biological factor in command. It seemed to be the breaking point, life and death, or less finally, wear and tear. The war-philosophers had properly made an art of it and had elevated one item, 'effusion of blood', to the height of a principle. It became humanity in battle, an act touching every side of our corporal being, and very warm. There was a line of variability, man running like leaven through all its estimates, making them irregular. The components were sensitive and illogical, and generals guarded themselves by the device of a reserve, the significant medium of their art. Goltz had said that if you know the enemy's strength, and he was fully deployed, then you could dispense with a reserve: but this was never. The possibility of accident, of some flaw in materials, was always in the general's mind, and the reserve unconsciously held meet it.

The 'felt' element in troops, not expressible in figures, had to be guessed at by the equivalent of *δοξα* in Plato, and the greatest commander of men was he whose intuitions most nearly happened. Nine-tenths of tactics were certain, to be taught in schools: but the irrational tenth was like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and there was the teste of generals. It could only be ensued by instinct so sharpened by thought often practising the stroke that at crisis it came as naturally as a reflex. There had been men whose *δοξα* so nearly approached perfection that by another road they seemed to reach the certainty of *επιστημη*. The Greeks might have called such genius for command *νοησις* had they been bothered by an Arab Movement.

My mind see-sawed back to apply this theory to ourselves; and at once saw that it was wider than mankind. It should apply also to materials. In the Turkish Army, things were scarce and precious,

men less esteemed than equipment. Our cue was to destroy not his army but his minerals. The death of a Turkish bridge or rail, machine gun or charge of high explosive was more profitable to us than death of a Turk. In the Arab army at the moment we were chary both materials and of men. Governments saw men only in mass: but ours being irregulars were not formations but individuals. An individual death was like a pebble dropped in water. Each might make only a brief hole, but rings of sorrow widened out from them. We could not afford casualties.

Materials were easier to replace. It was our obvious policy to be superior in some one branch, gun-cotton or machine-guns, or whatever could be made decisive. Foch and others had laid down the maxim, applied to men, of being superior in equipment in one dominant moment or respect: and for both things and men we might give the doctrine a twisted negative side, for cheapness' sake, and be weaker than the enemy everywhere except in that one point or matter.

Most wars were wars of contact, both forces striving into touch to avoid tactical surprise. Ours should be a war of detachment. We were to contain the enemy by silent threat of a vast unknown desert, not disclosing ourselves till the moment of attack. This attack might be nominal, directed not against him but against his stuff: so it would not seek either his strength or his weakness, but his most accessible material. In railway-cutting it would usually be an empty stretch of rail: and the more empty, the greater the tactical success. We might turn our average into a rule, though not a law, for war was antinomian, and develop a habit of never engaging the enemy. This would chime with the numerical plea never to afford a target. Many Turks on our front had no chance all the war to fire at us, and correspondingly we were never on the defensive except accidentally, and in error.

The corollary of such a rule must be perfect 'intelligence', so that we could plan in complete certainty. The chief agent must be the general's head, and his knowledge must be faultless, leaving no room for chance. Morale seemed to be built on knowledge and to be broken by ignorance. If we knew all about the enemy we would be comfortable. We should take more pains in the service of news than any regular staff ever took.

I was getting through my subject. The algebraical factor had been translated into term of Arabia, and fitted us like a glove. It promised victory. The biological factor had dictated to us a rational development of the tactical line which was most in accord with the genius of our tribesmen. There remained the psychological element to build up into an apt shape. It seemed to lack a Greek name, so I went to Xenophon, a temporary soldier like myself, and stole his word diathetics, which had been the art of Cyrus before he struck.

Our propaganda was its stained and ignoble offspring. It was the pathetic, almost the ethical in war. Some of it concerned the crowd, the adjustment of its spirit to the point where it became fit to exploit in action, the prearrangement of its changing spirit to a certain end. Some of it concerned the individual, and then it became a rare art of human kindness, transcending, by purposeful emotion, the gradual logical sequence of the mind. It was more subtle than tactics, and more worth doing, since it dealt with uncontrollables, with subjects incapable of direct command. It considered the capacity for mood of our men, their complexities and mutability, and the cultivation of what in them profited our intention.

We had to arrange their minds in order of battle, just as carefully and as formally as other officers would arrange their bodies: and not only the minds of our own men, though naturally they came first.

We must arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could reach them: and then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half the battle passed there in the back: and the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict, and of the neutrals looking on...

There were many humiliating material limits, but no moral impossibilities: so that the scope of our diathetical activities was unbounded. On it we should mainly depend for the means of victory on the Arab Front: and the novelty of it was our advantage. The printing press, and each newly-discovered method of intercommunication, favoured the intellectual above the physical, civilisation paying the mind always from the body's funds. We kindergarten soldiers were beginning our art of war in the atmosphere of the twentieth century, able to estimate our weapons without social prejudice. To the regular officer with the tradition of forty generations of serving soldiers behind him, the old arms were most honoured. We had seldom to concern ourselves with what our men did, but always with what they thought, and for us the diathetic would be more than half command. In Europe it was set a little aside, and entrusted to men outside the General Staff. In Asia the regular elements were so physically weak that the irregulars could not let the metaphysical weapon rust unused. A province would be won when we had taught the civilians in it to die for our ideal of freedom. The presence or absence of the enemy stood only on a secondary plane.

I had now been eight days lying in this remote tent, keeping my ideas general,\* till my brain became sick of unsupported thinking and had to be dragged to its work by an effort of will, and went off into a doze whenever that effort was relaxed. The fever passed: my dysentery ceased and with the restored strenght the present again became actual to me. Facts concrete and pertinent intruded themselves into my reveries, and my inconstant wit bore aside towards all these roads of escape. So I hurried into line my shadowy principles, to have them once precise before my power to evoke them faded.

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\* Not perhaps as successfully as I have written down. I thought my problems out mainly in term of Hejaz, illustred by what I knew of its men and its geography. These would have been too long here: so the argument has been compressed into an abstract form.

It seemed to me proven that rebellion must have an unassailable base, guarded not only from attack but from the fear of attack. These bases we had in the Red Sea ports: in the desert, in the spirits of our men. It must have a sophisticated alien enemy, disposed as an army of occupation in an area greater than it could dominate effectively from fortified posts. It must have a friendly population, of which some two per cent must be active, and the rest quietly sympathectic, to the point of not betraying the movements of the minority. The active rebels must have the virtues of secrecy and self-control: and the qualities of speed, endurance and independence of arteries of supplies. They must have the technical equipament to paralyse the enemy's communications, by destroying them where the enemy were not.

I asked myself if we had these qualities, and enjoyed these conditions, and believed that we did. The endurance of the Beduin and their camels gave us mobility. The desert gave us security, the power of denying targets to the enemy. Time was on our side to create a striking force. In Feisal's creed of nationality we had the doctrine to make every Arab ours. Final victory seemed certain.