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THE STRATEGY OF THE GUERRILLA WARFARE IN THOMAS EDWARD LAWRENCE'S THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM

Streszczenie: Artykuł zawiera opis strategii walki partyzanckiej w terenie pustynnym rozpoczętej przez pułkownika T.E.Lawrence'a, brytyjskiego archeologa, szpiega, żołnierza i dyplomatę. Autor opisuje drogą, jaką przebył Lawrence od młodego zarządcy wykopalisk w Karkemisz, praktykanta w szpiegowskim fachu, oficera odpowiedzialnego za mapy do przywódcy powstania arabskiego, podkreślając użycie odwiecznych praw walki partyzanckiej w kontekście przemysłowego społeczeństwa. Artykuł odnosi się do „Siedmiu filarów mądrości”, książki napisanej przez samego Lawrence'a, w której analizuje on drobiazgowo filozoficzne i historyczne źródła swoich akcji na pustyni i daje barwny opis Arabów, ich wierzeń, zwyczajów i nawyków.

Słowa kluczowe: Lawrence, wojna partyzancka, Siedem filarów mądrości, pustynia

Abstract: The article contains description of guerilla warfare strategy in the desert terrain initiated by Colonel T.E Lawrence, British archeologist, spy, soldier and diplomat. The author describes the way Lawrence had to go from a young Carchemish excavations manager, a spy trainee, a map officer to a leader of The Arab Revolt, highlighting the eternal principles of guerilla strategy in context of industrial society. The article refers to „The Seven Pillars of Wisdom” a book written by Lawrence himself, where he thoroughly analyzes philosophical and historical sources of his exploits in the desert and gives a vivid account of Arabs, their beliefs, habits and customs.

Key words: Lawrence, guerilla, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, desert

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Shaping the strategy of desert guerilla warfare

The strategy depends on many factors but the most important is the value of the guerilla soldier, his morale, motivation, familiarity with the area and technical skills and capacities. They are first-rate factors and decide on the victory or defeat. Lawrence during his travels and excavating works learnt about their values as civilians but he was not sure if his hospitable hosts and trusted subordinates (two social roles Lawrence had associated with the Arabs before the war) have got any military virtues. Describing them he noticed their tendency towards religious or ideological passion: "Arabs could be swung on an idea as a cord; for the unpledged allegiance of their minds made them obedient servants. None of them would escape the bond till success had come, and with it responsibility and duty and engagements."¹¹⁴ It replaced soldiers' features they lacked like corporate spirit, discipline and mutual confidence.¹¹⁵ The conclusion drawn by him was: "I concluded that the tribesmen were good for defence only. Their acquisitive recklessness made them keen on booty, and whetted them to tear up railways, plunder caravans, and steal camels; but they were too free-minded to endure command, or to fight in team."¹¹⁶ He confirmed that opinion: "The smaller the unit the better its performance. A thousand were a mob, ineffective against a company of trained Turks: but three or four Arabs in their hills would stop a dozen Turks."¹¹⁷ Their individualism made Lawrence to think on their use out of frames of regular army: "A man who could fight well by himself made generally a bad soldier, and these champions seemed to me no material for our drilling."¹¹⁸ And give them better and more fitting task: "but if we strengthened them by light automatic guns of the Lewis type, to be handled by themselves, they might be capable of holding their hills and serving as an efficient screen behind which we could build up, perhaps at Rabegh, an Arab regular mobile column, capable of meeting a Turkish force (distracted by guerilla warfare) on terms, and of defeating it piecemeal." ¹¹⁹ He was able to distinguish desert guerillas of Bedu from "heavy unwarlike

¹¹⁴ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.42.

¹¹⁵ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.136.

¹¹⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.104.

¹¹⁷ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.136.

¹¹⁸ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.104.

¹¹⁹ *ibidem* s.104

Syrian and Mesopotamian towns-folk that had to form Arab regular army ” whose task was to ” eventually finish the war by striking”¹²⁰

When Lawrence went off to the war he believed that the war would be according to the paradigm of conventional operations short, swift and decisive. His desert epiphany was an extraordinary intellectual and theoretical achievement of revolutionizing the guerilla in the within the context of modern industrialized warfare. Lying in his tent in Abdulla’s camp and tortured by dysentery Lawrence saw the situation depressive. The Arabs had been beaten in every direct encounter by regular Turkish troops. ”About ten days I lay in that tent, suffering a bodily weakness which made my animal self crawl away and hide till the shame was passed. As usual in such circumstances my mind cleared, my senses became more acute, and I began at last to think consecutively of the Arab Revolt, as an accustomed duty to rest upon against the pain.”¹²¹ (Lawrence 1993: 188)

He tried to do a short summary of his military knowledge:

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 taken me past Napoleon to Clausewitz and his school, to Caemmerer and Moltke, and the recent Frenchmen. They had all seemed to be one-sided; and after looking at Jomini and Willisen, I had found broader in Saxe and Guibert and the eighteenth century. However, Clausewitz was intellectually so much the master of them, and his book so logical and fascinating, that unconsciously I accepted his finality, until a comparison of Kuhne and Foch disgusted me with soldiers, wearied me of their officious glory, making me critical of all their light. In any case, my interest had been abstract, concerned with the theory and philosophy of warfare especially from the metaphysical side.¹²²

When recovered Lawrence started thinking about the solution. First, the problem of Medina. As he wrote: ”to distract myself from that I began to recall suitable maxims on the conduct of modern, scientific war. But they would not fit, and it worried me.”¹²³ Medina became an obsession for guerillas. The city was manned by the Turks and thus it was danger was when the guerillas were in Yenbo. The solution came soon: ”One afternoon I woke from a hot sleep, running with sweat and pricking with flies, and wondered what on earth was the good of

¹²⁰ ibidem s.104

¹²¹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.188.

¹²² ibidem s.188

¹²³ ibidem s.188

Medina to us?" The situation changed when the guerillas took Wejh and " To-day we were blockading the railway, and they only defending it."¹²⁴ The garrison of Medina were reduced to an inoffensive size, and its soldiers eating the transport animals they could no longer feed and the Arabs had taken away their power, and unnecessarily wanted to take away the town which was not base for them like Wejh, nor a threat like Wadi Ais¹²⁵

Second, Lawrence wrote about the aim of the war: "I began to drum out the aim in war. The books gave it pat-the destruction of the armed forces of the enemy by the one process-battle."¹²⁶ It was impossible, the Arabs had no chance to win regular army in the open field. Each trial could have negative results and possible victory could he purchased only by blood and the rebels could not afford to loose too many warriors. Lawrence bitterly concluded: " This was a hard saying for us. As the Arabs had no organized 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, saying it was necessary not to annihilate the enemy, but to break his courage. Only we showed no prospect of ever breaking anybody's courage"¹²⁷ His mind found contradiction in the way of thinking: " However, Goltz was a humbug, and these wise men must be talking metaphors; for we were indubitably winning our war; and as I pondered slowly, it dawned on me that we had won the Hejaz war. Out of every thousand square miles of Hejaz nine hundred and ninety-nine were now free."¹²⁸ Lawrence came across the interesting idea of rebellion and war expressed in question:

Did my provoked jape at Vickery, that rebellion was more like peace than like war, hold as much truth as haste? 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 he showed them the futility of clinging to our window-pane. Meditating in a dirty tent he was sure he found the turning point of the war – taking Wejh.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.188.

¹²⁵ ibidem s.188

¹²⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.189.

¹²⁷ ibidem s.189

¹²⁸ ibidem s.189

¹²⁹ ibidem s.189

Next step was looking for an alternative end and means of war. "Our seemed unlike the ritual of which Foch was priest" wrote Lawrence and recalled him. From Fochian point of view modern war between two nations representing two philosophies was a restatement of "the wars of religion whose logical end was utter destruction of one creed, and whose protagonists believed that God's judgement would prevail."¹³⁰ Lawrence found that definition idiotic from Philosophical point of view because opinions were arguable whereas convictions needed shooting to be cured. As he wrote: "To me the Foch war seemed only an exterminative variety, no more absolute than another (...) One could as explicably call it 'murder war'."¹³¹ Lawrence started thinking about Faisal's aims of war: "I wondered why Feisal wanted to fight the Turks, (...) and saw that their aim was geographical, to extrude the Turk (...). Their peace ideal of liberty could exercise itself only so. In pursuit of the ideal conditions we might kill Turks, because we disliked them very much; but the killing was a pure luxury. If they would go quietly the war would end."¹³² Lawrence wanted confirmation of his way of thinking by his host: "I was rewarded, for Abdulla's words were definite. He contrasted his hearers' present independence with their past servitude to Turkey, and roundly said that talk of Turkish heresy or the immoral doctrine of *yeni-turan*, or 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."¹³³

After setting the aims, ends and means of war Lawrence began the second stage of his analysis: "I (...) went on ravelling it out, considering now the whole house of war in its structural aspect, which was strategy, in its 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."¹³⁴

The first confusion was "the false antithesis between strategy, the aim in war, the synoptic regard seeing each part relative to the whole, and tactics, the means towards a strategic end, the particular steps of its staircase."¹³⁵ He divided the theory of war into three elements: Algebraical element of things, a Biological element of lives, and the Psychological element of ideas. An American strategist, Lawrence W. Moores pointed: "Lawrence faced the challenge

¹³⁰ T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books, 1991 New York s.190.

¹³¹ *ibidem*, s. 190

¹³² T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books, 1991 New York s.191.

¹³³ *ibidem*, s.191

¹³⁴ T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books, 1991 New York s.192.

¹³⁵ *ibidem*, s.192

of designing a campaign that: excluded the Turks from Arab lands (the algebraic element) at a minimum loss of Arab life (the biological element), freed the populace, and seized Damascus (the psychological element).”¹³⁶ The algebraical, inhuman element looked like a pure science, subject to mathematical law that dealt with ”known variables, 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.”¹³⁷ Lawrence wanted to take practical account and began to calculate how many square miles the rebels could make and how would the Turks defend the area. As a regular army they would defend their positions by a trench line across the bottom, if the Arabs fought as a regular army as well. He compared regular troops to plants: ” immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head.”¹³⁸ and that description did not fit to the Arabs. Another solution was to use mobility and omnipresence of nomads who could not be divided into squadrons or regiments, without immobile logistics, commanded only by embryonic staff but strong with devotion of their warriors: ” 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? 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.”¹³⁹ In his meditations he understood the advantage of guerilla over a regular soldier who ”might be helpless without a target, owning only what he sat on, and subjugating only what, by order, he could poke his rifle at.” Then he started to figure out how many soldiers the Turks would need to save their area from ” guerillas’ attack -in- depth, sedition putting up her head in every unoccupied one of those hundred thousand square miles.” His conclusion was: ” it 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.”¹⁴⁰

From enemy human resources Lawrence turned to own warriors (zealots as he called them):

¹³⁶ Moores, Lawrence w. Second Term AY 91-92. *T.E. Lawrence: Theorist and Campaign Planner*, School of Advanced Military Studies. Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College.s.16.

¹³⁷ T. E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.192

¹³⁸ ibidem, s.192

¹³⁹ ibidem, s.192

¹⁴⁰ ibidem, s.192

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 realized our raw materials and were apt with them, then climate, railway, desert, and technical weapons could also be attached to our interests.(...) Analogy in human things was fudge, anyhow; and war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.¹⁴¹

After weighing up algebraic element of war Lawrence: "sheered off the mathematical element, *episteme* (understanding) and plunged into the nature of the biological factor in command." It was associated with the terms like life and death, or less finally, wear and tear and was turned into an art by the war – philosophers who had elevated one item, 'effusion of blood', to the height of an essential. Estimates are always irregular due to unpredictability of human factor and sensitive and illogical components.¹⁴² The commanders prevented the defeat caused by accident and some flaw in material by creating reserves.

The 'felt' or emotional element in troops, is not expressible in figures and should be considered at by the equivalent of Plato's *doksa* (knowledge). According to that paradigm intuition prevailed in the battlefield and the test of generals lay in the irrational tenth that happens during the fight in contrary to nine-tenths of tactics certain enough to be teachable in schools. It could be ensued only by instinct enforced by practice to act as a reflex in the very moment of crisis. There had been military chiefs so nearly approached *doksa* they reached the *episteme*. Had the ancient Greeks bothered to rationalize revolt they might have called such genius for command *noesis* (intelligence).¹⁴³

Lawrence used that theoretical basis to apply it to current situation of own troops: "it was not bounded by mankind, that it applied also to materials. In Turkey things were scarce and precious, men less esteemed than equipment. Our cue was to destroy, not the Turk's army, but his minerals. The death of a Turkish bridge or rail, machine or gun or charge of high explosive, was more profitable to us than the death of a Turk."¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the Arab Army lacked at the moment both of materials and of men and the rebels could not afford casualties

¹⁴¹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.193

¹⁴² *ibidem*, s.193

¹⁴³ *ibidem*, s.193

¹⁴⁴ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.194

unlike materials that were easier to replace. Lawrence advocated the superiority in some one tangible branch: gun-cotton or machine-guns or whatever could be made decisive in contrary to superiority in men advised by orthodox theoreticians of war and moved farther: „We might be 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. The decision of what was critical would always be ours.”¹⁴⁵ He proposed new kind of war, a war of detachment instead of war of contact where both forces were striving to avoid tactical surprise:

We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert, not disclosing ourselves till we attacked. The 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 be usually an empty stretch of rail; and the more empty, the greater the tactical success. We might turn our average into a rule (not a law, since war was antinomian) and develop a habit of never engaging the enemy.¹⁴⁶

This chimed with the algebraical element for never being a target. As he recalled: ”Many Turks on our front had no chance all the war to fire on us, and we were never on the defensive except by accident and in error.”¹⁴⁷ There was a special role of intellectual effort embodied in general commander whose mind must be brilliant enough to plan in certainty and his understanding must be faultless, leaving no room for chance. His work must be supported by the service of news whose role must be more important than in regular army.

Lawrence made a short summary of his meditations:

I was getting through my subject. The algebraical factor had been translated into terms of Arabia, and fitted like a glove. It promised victory. The biological factor had dictated to us a development of the tactical line most in accord with the genius of our tribesmen. There remained the psychological element to build up into an apt shape. I went to Xenophon and stole, to name it, his word *diathetics* which had been the art of Cyrus before he struck.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *ibidem*, s.194

¹⁴⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.194

¹⁴⁷ *ibidem*, s.194

¹⁴⁸ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.195

Lawrence was right writing about *diathetics*: "Of this our 'propaganda' was the stained and ignoble offspring"¹⁴⁹ It dealt with ethics at war. Some of it concerned with social engineering of masses, adjusting the spirit of crowd where it became useful to exploit in action, and the pre-direction of this changing spirit to a certain end. Some of it concerned the individual as a rare art of human kindness, transcending, by purposed emotion, the gradual logical sequence of the mind. Lawrence emphasized it as a tool of control of own troops: "As we had seldom to concern ourselves with what our men did, but always with what they thought, the diathetic for us would be more than half the command."¹⁵⁰ It was something that later was named „hearts and minds strategy" and was aimed also at enemies' minds, allied and neutrals. Lawrence wrote about *diathetics* with enthusiasm: "There were many humiliating material limits, but no moral impossibilities; so that the scope of our diathetical activities was unbounded.(...) The printing press, and each newly - discovered method of communication favoured the intellectual above the physical, civilization 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, receiving our weapons without prejudice."¹⁵¹ This new method was not truly recognised in Europe unlike Asia:" In Europe it was set a little aside, and entrusted to men outside the General Staff. In Asia the regular elements were so weak that irregulars could not let the metaphysical weapon rust unused."¹⁵²

After describing Algebraical, Biological and Psychological elements of war Lawrence tried to explain role of battles in the desert: "Battles in Arabia were a mistake, since we profited in them only by the ammunition the enemy fired off (...) We had nothing material to lose, so our best line was to defend nothing and to shoot nothing. Our cards were speed and time, not hitting power."¹⁵³

Lawrence concluded:

It seemed to me proven that our rebellion had an unassailable base, guarded not only from attack, but from the fear of attack. It had a sophisticated alien enemy, disposed as an army of occupation in an area greater than could be dominated effectively

¹⁴⁹ ibidem, s.195

¹⁵⁰ ibidem, s.195

¹⁵¹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.195

¹⁵² ibidem, s.195

¹⁵³ ibidem, s.195

from fortified posts. It had a friendly population, of which some two in the hundred were active, and the rest quietly sympathetic to the point of not betraying the movements of the minority.¹⁵⁴

After meeting with his military chiefs Lawrence shared results of his sick-bed ruminations with them. As a good officer of regular army began from rethinking the military situations:

Every effort was still directed against the railway. Newcombe and Garland were near Muadhdam with Sherif Sharraf and Maulud. (...) Newcombe meant then to move all Feisal's men forward very close to Medain Salih, and, by taking and holding a part of the line, to cut off Medina and compel its early surrender. Wilson was coming up to help in this operation, and Davenport would take as many of the Egyptian army as he could transport, to reinforce the Arab attack.¹⁵⁵

But after fever and dysentery in Abdulla's camp that had given him leisure to meditate upon the strategy and tactics of irregular war, he understood that the essence of this plan were wrong. He wanted to persuade my chiefs his new theory. As he recalled: "So, I begun with three propositions. Firstly, that irregulars would not attack places, and so remained incapable of forcing a decision. Secondly that they were as unable to defend a line or point as they were to attack it. Thirdly, that their virtue lay in depth not in face."¹⁵⁶

His way of thinking was going along those lines that he worked out when he was sick in Abdullah's camp. As he stated, the character of Arab war was unusual because it is geographical and Turkish Army as fighting force is an accident. The rebels' aim was to seek the enemy's weakest material link, hammer it till time made their whole chain fail. The Beduin, guerilla's largest resources must not be used to regular operations but their skills and abilities like mobility, toughness, self-assurance, knowledge of the country, intelligent courage would be crucial in 'hit and run' actions. The strength of guerillas lay in dispersal so they must extend front to maximum to impose on enemy the longest passive defence, the most costly form of war exhausting their material resources. The rebels have to to attain their aims with the greatest economy of life:

To me an unnecessary action, or shot, or casualty, was not only waste but sin. I was unable to take the professional view that all successful actions were gains. Our rebels were not materials, like soldiers, but friends of ours, trusting our

¹⁵⁴ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.196

¹⁵⁵ ibidem, s.196

¹⁵⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.224

leadership. We were not in command nationally, but by invitation; and our men were volunteers, individuals, local men, relatives, so that a death was a personal sorrow to many in the army. Even from the purely military point of view the assault seemed to me a blunder.¹⁵⁷

The key factors are patience and superhuman skills and if Feisal's commanders follow the direction of Maurice de Saxe they could reach victory without battle, only by pressing out their mathematical and psychological advantages. He also highlighted advantage of rebels in transport, machine guns, cars and high explosives that led to deploying small and mobile striking force and using it to attack at distributed points along the Turkish Line, to force them strengthen their positions.¹⁵⁸ Then came to weighing up concrete geographical point, Medina: "We must not take Medina. The Turks are harmless there. If we imprisoned them all - say, in Egypt - they would cost us in food, water and guards. We want them right where they are, at Medina, and every other distant place, in the largest numbers."¹⁵⁹ As for railway, Lawrence wanted it „just working, but only just, with the maximum of loss and discomfort."¹⁶⁰ As he wrote: "The factor of food would confine him to the railways, but he was welcome to the Hejaz Railway, and the Trans-Jordan railway, and the Palestine and Syrian railways for the duration of the war, so long as he gave us the other nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of the Arab world."¹⁶¹ What is more he postulated an active management of enemies' moves: "If he tended to evacuate too soon, as a step to concentrating in the small area which his numbers could dominate effectually, then we should have to restore his confidence by reducing our enterprises against him."¹⁶² He also wanted to use Turkish imperial pride, called by him "stupidity" that "would be our ally, for he would like to hold, or to think he held, as much of his old provinces as possible. This pride in his imperial heritage would keep him in his present absurd position - all flanks and no front.

Next, he criticized the operational scheme:

To hold a middle point of the railway would be expensive for the holding force might be threatened from each side. The mixture of Egyptian troops with tribesmen

¹⁵⁷ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.163

¹⁵⁸ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.224

¹⁵⁹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.225

¹⁶⁰ ibidem, s.225

¹⁶¹ ibidem, s.225

¹⁶² T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.225

was a moral weakness. If there were professional soldiers present, the Beduin would stand aside and watch them work, glad to be excused the leading part.¹⁶³

Unfortunately, as he bitterly concluded: "Neither my general reasoning, however, nor my particular objections had much weight. The plans were made, and the preparations advanced. Everyone was too busy with his own work to give me specific authority to launch out on mine. All I gained was a hearing, and a qualified admission that my counter-offensive might be a useful diversion."¹⁶⁴ He explained what he meant writing 'a useful diversion': "I was working out with Auda abu Tayi a march to the Howeitat in their spring pastures of the Syrian desert. From them we might raise a mobile camel force, and rush Aqaba from the eastward without guns or machine-guns."¹⁶⁵ It sounded like a reconnaissance but in fact it was an extreme example of a turning movement including a six hundred miles' desert journey and attack on the unguarded site within gunfire of British ships, but according to Auda and Feisal possible with dynamite, money and assistance of smaller clans about Akaba.¹⁶⁶ It was, his long cherished project of occupying Aqaba from the interior instead of by a Franco-British force from the sea.

Ride on Aqaba - putting theory into practice.

Aqaba had special value to the Turks because it might be a threat to the right flank of the British army. Their higher command acknowledged it their main route to the Canal in the end of 1914 but due to food and water difficulties they adopted the Beersheba route. When the British left the Canal positions and had thrust forward to Gaza and Beersheba what made the feeding of the Turkish army easier by shortening its line. Consequently, the Turks had surplus transport. Additionally, it now lay behind the British right, and a small Turkish force operating from it would threaten either El Arish or Suez. The Arabs also needed Aqaba to extend their front and to link up with the British. If they took it they had Sinai and junction with British army under command of Sir Archibald Murray. Being really useful, they would obtain material help. Consequently, Aqaba meant for the Arabs, plenty in food, money, guns, advisers. Lawrence wanted the contact with the British "to act as the right wing of the Allies

¹⁶³ ibidem, s.225

¹⁶⁴ ibidem, s.225

¹⁶⁵ ibidem, s.225

¹⁶⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.226

in the conquest of Palestine and Syria; and to assert the Arabic-speaking peoples' desire or desert of freedom and self-government." He knew that "if the revolt did not reach the main battlefield against Turkey it would have to confess failure, and remain a side-show of a side-show. I had preached to Feisal, from our first meeting, that freedom was taken, not given."¹⁶⁷

There is indeed, a slightly ironical flavour that Lawrence, in his first trial of their new bloodless strategy, had levied a blond – tax on the enemy at a highest rate that modern 'murder war' can perhaps show. The British forces in trying unsuccessfully to capture Gaza in March and April were defeated at a permanent cost to themselves of 5.800 men.¹⁶⁸ The capture of Aqaba was a sudden break in the clouds that overrun the Egyptian front in the spring and summer of 1917. From the point of view of moral effect it was the one definite achievement that could be set off against the double British failure before Gaza. Strategically, it removed all danger of a Turkish raid through Sinai against the Suez Canal or the communications of the British army in Palestine. It also opened up a new line of operation by which the Arabs could give positive assistance to a renewed British advance. Aqaba certainly appeared to earn Lawrence the astonishment and respect of his British superiors. He was promoted to major and given a continuing role helping coordinate the Arab Revolt. After taking Aqaba Lawrence concluded "At Wejeh the Hejaz war was won: after Aqaba it was ended. Feisal's army had cleared off its Arabian liabilities and now, under General Allenby the joint Commander-in-Chief, its role was to take part in the military deliverance of Syria."¹⁶⁹

Terrain, organization, psychology and leadership

Lawrence understood the change of the character of future campaign caused by geographical and sociological reasons: " The difference between Hejaz and Syria was the difference between the desert and the sown. The problem which faced us was one of character - the learning to become civil." and added: " Unless we became peasants too, the independence as movement would get no further. It was good for the Arab Revolt that so early in its growth this change imposed We had been hopelessly labouring to plough waste lands; to make

¹⁶⁷ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.274

¹⁶⁸ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.321

¹⁶⁹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.328

nationality grow in a place itself.”¹⁷⁰ He wanted to change the base of military operations from desert to inhabited area: ” If we would prolong our life, we must win into the ornamented lands; to the villages where roofs or fields held men's eyes downward and near; and begin our campaign as we had begun that in Wadi Ais, by a study of the map, and a recollection of the nature of this our battleground of Syria.”¹⁷¹ Lawrence began his description of Syria writing about secluded area surrounded by natural boundaries and divided into two parts by mountains: ” Our feet were upon its southern boundary. To the east stretched the nomadic desert. To the west Syria was limited by the Mediterranean, from Gaza to Alexandretta. On the north the Turkish populations of Anatolia gave it an end. Within these limits the land was much parcelled up by natural divisions. Of them the first and greatest was longitudinal; the rugged spine of mountains which, from north to south, divided a coast strip from a wide inland plain.”¹⁷² Those internal and external limits resulted in divisions between its inhabitants: ”These areas had climatic differences so marked that they made two countries, two races almost, with their respective populations. The shore Syrians lived in different houses, fed and worked differently, used an Arabic differing by inflection and in tone from that of the inlanders. They spoke of the interior unwillingly, as of a wild land of blood and terror.”¹⁷³ The rivers sub-divided inland plains into valleys that were the most prosperous places in the country with its stable inhabitants contrasting with mobile and warlike population of the borderland. Nature had so divided the country into zones and man had added additional complexity to compartments created by nature. As a result each of these divisions was walled off into different communities to gather into hands for offensive against the Turks.¹⁷⁴

Lawrence highlighted the role of common language as a unification factor: ”The master-key of opinion lay in the common language: where also, lay the key of imagination. Moslems whose mother tongue was Arabic looked upon themselves for that reason as a chosen people. Their heritage of the Koran and classical literature held the Arabic-speaking peoples together. Patriotism, ordinarily of soil or race, was warped to a language.”¹⁷⁵ A second source of political inspiration was glory of the early Khalifate, that was more legend than historical

¹⁷⁰ ibidem, s.328

¹⁷¹ ibidem, s.328

¹⁷² T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.329

¹⁷³ ibidem, s.329

¹⁷⁴ ibidem, s.328

¹⁷⁵ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.336

truth, but thanks to it the Arabs believed that their past was more splendid than Ottoman misgovernment. Feisal and Lawrence knew that common language and tradition were not a stable base to built the Arab Government: "Any wide attempt after unity would make a patched and parcelled thing, ungrateful to a people whose instincts ever returned towards parochial home rule."¹⁷⁶ Lawrence concluded:

Our excuse for over-running expediency was War. Syria, ripe for spasmodic local revolt, might be seethed up into insurrection, if a new factor, offering to realize that centripetal nationalism of the Beyrout Cyclopaedists, arose to restrain the jarring sects and classes. Novel the factor must be, to avoid raising a jealousy of itself: not foreign, since the conceit of Syria forbade. Within our sight the only independent factor with acceptable groundwork and fighting adherents was a Sunni prince, like Feisal, pretending to revive the glories of Ommayad or Ayubid.¹⁷⁷

In his opinion Feisal "might momentarily combine the inland men until success came with its need to transfer their debauched enthusiasm to the service of ordered government. Then would come reaction; but only after victory; and for victory everything material and moral might be pawned. There remained the technique and direction of the new revolts: but the direction a blind man could see."¹⁷⁸

The critical centre of Syria were the Yarmuk Valley, Hauran, and Deraa. When Hauran joined the campaign it would be well ended. Dearaa and the Yarmuk Valley would provide the leverage on which to bear in loosening the enemy's hold on the Hauran. The process should be to set up another ladder of tribes, similar to that from Wejh to Akaba made of steps of Howeitat, Beni Sakhr, Sherarat, Rualla, and Serahin, to raise guerillas three hundred miles to Azrak, the oasis nearest Hauran and Jebel Druse. In strategic execution the new campaign would be the repetition of the old, but improved by the experience already gained. Lawrence wrote: " In character our operations of development for the final stroke should be like naval war, in mobility, ubiquity, independence of bases and communications, ignoring of ground features, of strategic areas, of fixed directions, of fixed points." And added: " He who commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much or as little of the war as he will.

¹⁷⁶ *ibidem*, s.336

¹⁷⁷ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.337

¹⁷⁸ *ibidem*, s.337

And we commanded the desert.”¹⁷⁹ He compared desert operations to naval ones: ” Desert operations should be like such wars at the sea in mobility, their ubiquity, independence of bases and communications, their lack of ground features, of strategic areas, of fixed directions, of fixed points.”¹⁸⁰ And added: ”Camel raiding-parties are self-contained like ships. They could cruise securely along the enemy’s land-frontier, just out of sight of his posts along the edge of cultivation, and tap or raid into his lines where it seemed easiest and benefiting, with a sure retreat always behind them in an element which the Turks could not explore.¹⁸¹” As for water he wrote: ”would not want to carry more than a pint each. (...) In summer the camels would do about two hundred and fifty miles after a watering; a three days’ vigorous march. An easy stage was fifty miles: eighty was good: in an emergency we might do one hundred and ten miles in the twenty-four hours (...) Wells were seldom a hundred miles apart, so the pint reserve was latitude enough.”¹⁸² Food was also a very important factor: “on them we were independent of supply for six weeks if each man had a half bag of flour; forty – five pounds of weigh, slung on his riding – saddle: “¹⁸³ The necessary speed and range for this distant war could be attained through the frugality of the Arabs, and their efficiency in handling that ‘intricate material’, the camel, which like a tank has a remarkable performance in skilled hands and easily breaks down in unskilled. Camels determined guerillas’ range: ”Our six weeks’ food gave us capacity for a thousand miles out and home. The endurance of our camels made it possible for us (for me, the camel-novice in the army, ‘painful’ would be the fitter word) to ride fifteen hundred miles in thirty days, without fear of starvation; because, even if we exceeded in time, each of us sat on two hundred pounds of potential meat, and the man made camelless could double-bank another, riding two-up, in emergency.”¹⁸⁴

Lawrence and Faisal avoided the stiff forms of organization. For concentration of force it would be ruinous handicap. But it suited to the principle of the widest distribution of force enabling the Arab command to have the greatest possible number of raids in course at the same time when fluidity was added to mobility: ” The distribution of the raiding parties was unorthodox. We could not mix or combine tribes, because of their distrusts: nor could we use

¹⁷⁹ ibidem, s.337

¹⁸⁰ ibidem, s.337

¹⁸¹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.337

¹⁸² T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.338

¹⁸³ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.337

¹⁸⁴ ibidem, s.337

one in the territory of another. In compensation we aimed at the widest dissipation of force; and we added fluidity to speed by using one district on Monday, another on Tuesday, a third on Wednesday. Thus natural mobility was reinforced. In pursuit, our ranks refilled with fresh men at each new tribe, and maintained the pristine energy. In a real sense maximum disorder was our equilibrium.”¹⁸⁵ I prosed forth on my hoary theorem that we lived by our raggedness and beat the Turk by our uncertainty.¹⁸⁶

According to Lawrence, tactics should be based on tip and run”: not pushes, but strokes: “ We should never try to improve our advantage. We should use the smallest force in the quickest time at the farthest place. Sure of an unhindered retreat into their desert-climate which the Turks could not explore.”¹⁸⁷ The new strategy was well adapted to tribal conditions: “ It was impossible to mix or combine tribes, since they distrusted or disliked one another. Likewise we could use the men of one tribe in the territory of another.” Lawrence wrote:

In practice we should not employ in the firing line the great numbers which a simple system put theoretically at our disposal, lest our attack (as contrasted with our threat) become too extended. The moral strain of isolated fighting made 'simple' war very hard upon the soldier, exacting from him special initiative, endurance, enthusiasm.”¹⁸⁸

The ordinary rank and – file if that is the proper term for the massively articulated character of the Arab army - were bound together by the common ideal of the revolt. They were all volunteers; some may have hoped for health, but this idea distracted their tribal leaders more than the private soldier, who was always at liberty to leave the ranks “without penalty whenever the conviction failed him: the only contract was honor”.¹⁸⁹ In Lawrence’s army, control was less important than the diversity of quality and the redundancy of action. There were no common denominators here because nothing was common about the nature of the insurgent warfare; and where one man failed to act, one of his mates would rise to stand in his stead. The conventional force is always willing to reduce risk through the control:

By this substitution of a sure job for a possible masterpiece, military science made a deliberate sacrifice of a capacity in order to reduce the uncertain element, the

¹⁸⁵ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.338

¹⁸⁶ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.541

¹⁸⁷ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.337

¹⁸⁸ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.338

¹⁸⁹ T.E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.339

bionomic factor, in enlisted humanity. Discipline's necessary accompaniment was compound or social war – that form in which the fighting man was the product of the multiplied exertions of a long hierarchy, from workshop to supply unit, kept him active in the field.

The diverse quality of a single guerilla, in Lawrence's mind would equal the composite strength of a conventional squaw, for every man was a killer, whereas the soldier fought with one hand tied to his logistical rear. In practice, it was more important that the guerilla his all times than engaged him actively in a fight, for the threat in the fighting specter continually haunted the regular soldier, draining him from the initiative, courage and hope. The success at Aqaba demonstrated one thing to all to judge:

Irregular war was far more intellectual than a bayonet charge, far more exhausting than service in the comfortable imitative obedience of an ordered army. Guerillas must be allowed liberal work room: in irregular war, of two men together, one was being wasted. Our ideal should be to make our battle a series of single combats, our ranks a happy alliance of agile commanders-in-chief.¹⁹⁰

Lawrence was a first theorist and practitioner to combine the ancient art of guerilla with modern industrial society. He was able to discard the dominant military paradigm, which focuses on the destruction of the enemy and forge a new one that combined old-age raiding techniques with industrial era weaponry. According to Lawrence, victory did not lie in the physical destruction of foe because he wanted a living demoralized mob, not army of dead heroes. He also wanted to squeeze the main Turkish line of supply, not to destroy it. Lawrence's theory of guerilla warfare was imposing costs on the enemy, tying up his troops, bleeding him rather decapitating.

T.E.Lawrence. 1991. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, New York: Anchor Books.

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¹⁹⁰ .E.Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Anchor Books,1991 New York s.338