



On Tactics: A Theory of Victory in Battle

By B.A. Friedman

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In my experience, the books that have engaged and challenged me the most are the ones with which I did not completely agree. These books have made me think and look at things in a different perspective. One recent volume which clearly falls into this elite category for me is B.A. Friedman's *On Tactics*. It is a book which I believe will clearly engage, challenge, and make readers think.

Within the pages of *On Tactics*, Friedman focuses on a subject clearly challenging in itself — tactical theory. In his preface, he defines the book's specific objective and why the topic is such a test to address. He states, "The student of strategy, once he realizes the importance of the concept, has a well-organized field in which to plant the seeds of his intellectual development. The furrows are straight and parallel, the plow is sharp and ready, and even the fallow fields are clearly defined. The study of tactics offers no such easy introduction." He continues, "Unlike strategy itself, there is no organizing structure such as that provided by Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* (1976/1832). This work is an attempt to provide that structure or at least the beginning of one."

In providing a structure or the initial groundwork for one, Friedman organizes his volume into two major parts which build upon each other. In his first section, the author has crafted a group of tactical tenets which he believes provides the foundation for the structure of tactical theory. To set the conditions for his discussion, he emphasizes that the principles of war lack the standardization and discipline to be utilized in tactical theory. In particular, he opines that the principles do not adhere to the three planes which he feels tactics live in — physical, mental, and moral. It is these planes which provide the organization for his tenets.

Within the physical plane, he has placed four tenets which he believes enable a tactician to arrange forces on the battlefield — maneuver, mass, firepower, and tempo. These physical tenets in turn will impose mental effects on an enemy. These mental tenets are deception, surprise, confusion, and shock. Finally, these mental effects (tenets), if achieved, will force the enemy to lose his moral cohesion which is the one tenet under the moral tenet category.

For the reader, there is much to think about here. Do the principles of war only have relevance to the strategic level of war? Do tactics "live" in the physical, mental, and moral planes? Has Friedman selected the right tenets? Does Friedman's path of tenets from physical to mental to moral have validity? Certainly, excellent questions which make for great debate.

In Friedman's second section, he builds on the above tenets and addresses a group of tactical concepts that he considers the most important in dealing with the realities of the tactical context. These concepts include the culminating point of victory; the offense, the defense, and the initiative; command and control; environment and geography; and linking tactics with strategy. Once again, there is significant food for thought in Friedman's

discussion on each of these. However, for me personally, I would have liked a bit more discussion early on as to why he considered these the most important concepts and more detail on the relationship between the tenets and concepts. This was addressed in more substance in his excellent conclusion but would have been far more beneficial if discussed in earlier chapters.

Friedman concludes his volume with an interesting collection of essays, which in a common theme with the book, make you think. The subjects he touches on include the center of gravity, principles of planning, the organization of tactically successful militaries, and training and education. Each of these is a stand-alone essay in itself. However, the author strives to tie them in with his past discussion on tactical theory (tenets and concepts).

In summary, does B.A. Friedman achieve his primary objective of providing a structure or at least the beginning of one in the area of tactical theory within *On Tactics*? In my opinion, he has not delivered on providing this structure, but I also contend that may have been too ambitious a goal. However, I feel he has certainly made some valuable contributions in this area. He has accomplished this by crafting a volume that is sure to spark dialogue and debate and challenge and engage all readers.