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The Imperial Legacies of T. E. Lawrence: A Study in Political and Organizational Hybridity

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Abstract

T.E. Lawrence is a celebrated figure in military history and a key reference point for the idea that small and highly mobile armed units can decisively undermine the strategic capacities of conventional armies and empires. Whilst Lawrence played an important role in supporting Arab self-determination, his legacy has been the subject of some controversy in the Arab world. We show the 'hybridised' nature of this legacy in the fields of military intelligence and irregular warfare. Lawrence borrowed the techniques of mobile warfare from local Arab sources during the First World War. This 'borrowing' then became the basis of further variations on the theme of mobility and autonomy as the lessons of the Arab revolt were applied to the clandestine operations of organizations such as the SAS and the SOE during the Second World War. The paper explores the processes by which these borrowings occurred; highlighting the ways in which Lawrence's legacy resonates with the covert operations of today's intelligence organizations and with contemporary interest in 'networked' forms in the aftermath of 9/11.

Keywords: hybridity, post-colonialism, networks, strategy, terror organizations, Middle East

1. Introduction

Recent tumultuous events in the societies of the Arab Middle East have generated much comment and debate on the social economic and political regeneration of the region. Whilst the idea of connecting these societies more closely to the 'global' economy has been endorsed by some scholars (Zahra 2010), talk of social economic and political 'reconstruction' is, for many others, all too redolent of colonial interventions past and present. (Adelson, 1995; Sacks, 2002). Few historical figures are more closely linked to this intervention than T.E. Lawrence. The paper will focus on two prominent aspects of Lawrence's life and work, both of which are relevant to the theme of historical recovery. Lawrence personifies and symbolises many of the complexities and contradictions of the colonial encounter. He was a leading proponent of Arab self- determination at a time when the future states of Israel, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia were being created by Anglo- French diplomats, soldiers and planners. Lawrence is also an important strategic thinker and a key reference point for the idea that small, highly mobile armed units can decisively undermine the strategic position of well defended armies and empires. This is highly relevant to the idea that the Western powers are now confronted with an intangible enemy whose fighting abilities are focused on creating a near-permanent climate of disruption and uncertainty.

This paper will attempt to recover some of what occurred in the British involvement in the Middle East in the early 20th century. Lawrence's part in this involvement is not always easy to uncover. The figure that has come to be known as Lawrence of Arabia has been constructed from successive layers of official propaganda, mythogeny and hagiography. Western (particularly British and US) biographers have continued to view Lawrence as a political visionary and 'uncrowned king' of the Arab revolt against the 500 year rule of the Turks (Asher, 1999; Korda, 2011). This view of Lawrence can however be contrasted with an alternative view, widely held in the Arab world, that Lawrence should be understood as a political manipulator, colonial imposter and spy (Mousa, 1966). Whilst Lawrence has been the subject of many biographical and historical studies, there are still doubts as to precise nature of his involvement with the Arab independence movement. His activities as an political officer prefigure the practice of appointing military 'advisors' and field officers whose role is to engage

closely with political and military insurgents. We examine this role in some detail, shedding light on Lawrence as a practitioner of 'intelligence' warfare. The paper was partly inspired by research on the question of how the adoption of Western management practices in Arab societies can be understood in relation to complex forms of cultural borrowing and creative appropriation. We draw on these concepts to look more closely at the idea that Lawrence deconstructed conventions of military hierarchy, creating a war of mobility, diffusion and intangible threat (Arquilla & Ronfeld, 1999; Shapiro, 2005; Munro, 2010). We also show the ways in the desert war combined highly decentralised modes of coordinated movement with centralised power exercised by the British military and diplomatic authorities. In the closing sections of the article we highlight the ways in which Lawrence's legacy resonates with the covert operations of today's intelligence organizations and with contemporary interest in 'networked' forms in the aftermath of 9/11. The paper draws on a wide range of sources including Lawrence's Seven Pillars of Wisdom (1935), Lawrence's military and strategic writings (Brown, 2005) and biographies (Wilsons, 1989; Asher, 1999; Korda, 2010). We also draw on more specialised histories of intelligence warfare and on contemporary analyses of modern irregular warfare (Arquilla & Ronfeld, 1999; Munro, 2010).

The paper is structured as follows: we begin with a short orientation that provides brief details of Lawrence's early life as an orientalist scholar, archaeologist and linguist who engaged closely with Arab culture dialects and manners. We then build on this orientation to examine the specific ways in which Lawrence collaborated with Arab leaders and field commanders during the revolt of 1915–1918. The third part of the paper examines Lawrence's doctrine of irregular warfare, showing the ways in which this juxtaposed Western and non- Western artefacts and modes of organization, borrowing extensively from Bedu culture, new communications technologies and the strategic possibilities offered by the desert itself. The paper ends by highlighting the ways in which the contending, but closely interleaved elements of hierarchy and networks are combined in the organization of latter day insurgency and counter insurgency organizations.

2. Organizational Hybridity, Networks and the Historical Legacies of T. E. Lawrence: Some Notes on Method

This paper examines the historical legacy of T.E. Lawrence and British imperial involvement in Arab political and military struggles during and immediately after the First World War. The paper highlights the significance of this legacy for the colonial encounter, focusing on two specific areas where there is a need for further elucidation and analysis, namely i) Lawrence's activities as a political officer in the field and his influence on the Arab revolt and ii) his role as an innovator in military organization and strategy. As noted the myth making that surrounds 'Lawrence of Arabia' has perpetuated the belief that Lawrence 'led' the revolt of irrational and politically disorganized tribesman against the Turkish oppressors. However the historical record shows that relations were much more complex than would be suggested by the received image of Lawrence as a princely Emir or crusader of Arab liberation. The paper shows the politically hybridised quality of Lawrence's encounter with the leaders of the Arab revolt, showing his Janus-faced role as both 'ally' and 'imposter' who was able to mediate between the highest military and diplomatic authorities and Arab leaders on the ground. The theoretical underpinning for our analysis is provided by Clegg and Courpasson's (2004) work on politically and organizationally hybrid organisational forms that combine elements of decentralisation whilst retaining strong elements of bureaucratic centralisation. Comment on 'hybrid political regimes' is centred on the long-standing question of how centralised control and coordination of resources may be combined with the need for more flexible forms, particularly those that devolve power away from the traditionally centralised and hierarchical bureaucratic forms (Adler & Borys, 1996; Courpasson, 2000; Clegg & Courpasson, 2004). Exerting close control over actors working in devolved or collaborative situations is inherently difficult (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004). These actors are 'potentially sovereign in their own right' and thus capable of resisting, challenging or appropriating the (Clegg et al., 2002, p. 333) the directives of politically centralised authorities. Whilst the administration of rules may confer a significant degree of discretion on these actors:

'...this discretion does not diminish the central power of governing bodies; on the contrary it strengthens it, because the people accepting responsibility for these projects are chosen in line with the rationale of governing bodies. They know that their obligation is to act creatively within systems designed by these governors' (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004: 535).

We draw on the notion of political/organizational hybridity to shed light on Lawrence's activities as an intelligence officer, showing the inherently ambiguous and 'multidirectional' distribution of power that emerged from his dealings with Arab collaborators and the central authorities in Cairo. We also show how the encounter between Lawrence and Arab leaders was shaped by the systematic use of misinformation and strategic deception.

2.1 Lawrence's Role as an Innovator in Military Organization and Strategy

As noted earlier more needs to be learnt about Lawrence's role as an innovator in military organization and strategy. Lawrence immersed himself in the culture the Bedu and his experience of desert travel tribal warfare profoundly influenced his thinking about irregular war of mobility (Wilson, 1989; Asher, 1999: 204–25). The process whereby this occurred requires further elucidation not just in relation to the question of how the war of movement promulgated by Lawrence was influenced by the political and cultural context of war in the desert, but also in relation to the subsequent development of irregular warfare. Bhabha (1994) Prasad (2003) and Spivak (1999) have argued that the colonial encounter is characterised not simply by the unilateral imposition of imperial power but also by more complex forms of reciprocity, borrowing and exchange. Prasad (2003) notes further, that colonialism is ambivalent about the boundary that separates 'the West' from the 'non West'. On one hand this distinction is one of dichotomised binary opposition, and on the other it is penetrated by western analytic categories and perspectives. The colonial encounter is, on this view necessarily and irreducibly hybridised in the sense that its attempt to deny other knowledges is inevitably compromised. Prasad notes that this encounter may be characterised by complex processes of cultural appropriation, translation or borrowing (see also Gandhi, 1998: 150). This cultural borrowing is characterised by the incorporation of 'differential knowledges' and relatedly, by new hybrid forms and expressions of power. Said (1978) argued that the philosophy of post-colonialism strives for interpreting and comprehending problems existing in developing societies by means of "retrospective reflection on colonialism" (Said, 1978, p. 45). Prasad (2003, p. 3) agrees that the post-colonialist view on such phenomena as management is based on the idea of 'decolonisation' of the minds and previous traditional and imposed approaches.

Authors who have written in the post colonial mould, such as Said and Fanon, have drawn our attention to the way Western knowledge and procedures have achieved dominance through the active dissemination of their views. After World War II, the rise of nationalist discourse against colonialism meant that multiple ideological views now existed. The West rebutted those who challenged the authority and dominance of Western hegemony on the basis that the then-present economic and sociological theories supported their superiority (Saied, in Long, 2008). From a postcolonial perspective, we can see how the West was employing an image of the Orient that it had itself created and which conveniently justified its claim of superiority. This stereotyping of the Orient furthermore precluded real intercultural communications a hallmark of colonialism and allowed for a simple dichotomy to take shape in which the West envisaged itself as superior and the rest as inferior (Long, 2008).

The paper will seek to highlight ways in which the irregular war prosecuted by Lawrence emerged from a bricolage of premodern and modern practices, technologies and modes of organizing. We show how the process of cultural borrowing was reflected in Lawrence's adoption of Arab dress and manners, in his rejection of conventionally 'bureaucratic' military forms of organization, and his use of small highly mobile units in the desert spaces of the Arabian Peninsula. We will also seek to show that processes of borrowing and adaptation continued as the techniques of irregular warfare were reproduced and further elaborated in different historic-political contexts, first in the Second World War and then in a variety of latter-day insurgency and 'terror' organizations.

2.2 Lawrence the Orientalist

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in Oxford in 1888. The young Lawrence was a keen student of architectural history. He spent a large part of his youth exploring English and French churches. He later extended this to a survey of crusader castles and his doctoral thesis focused on the question of whether distinctive fortifications of the crusades had been exported from the West, borrowed from the East or emerging from a cross-cultural melange that produced an entirely new form of defensive fortification (Wilson, 1983; Asher, 1999). Lawrence spent some months as an itinerant wanderer in Syria where he gained unusually close knowledge of Arab manners customs and local dialects – this experience was to serve Lawrence well in his later career as a political officer. Whilst at Oxford Lawrence came under the influence of T. H. Hogarth, an orientalist savant and author of a wandering scholar in the Levant (1896). Hogarth's patronage opened the way for a job at the Ashmolean Museum and later a post at the British Museum and a two year period spent with the archaeological excavations at Carchemish, a small settlement on the banks of the Euphrates. The Carchemish period reveals the some early signs of Lawrence as an imperialist operative and negotiator. He became skilled in the management of large workforces, developed new payment schemes, dispensed medicines and arbitrated in personal feuds. Oriental scholarship gave Lawrence the linguistic and cultural basis for his subsequent role as a Middle Eastern 'expert'. Lawrence venerated the 'noble' as opposed to the 'vulgar' Arab (Note 1). He saw contemporary French attempts to educate the Arabs of the Levant as an adulteration of this purity. Whilst this orientalism can be seen a highly restrictive denial of Arab political autonomy and cultural identity, Lawrence's early career was marked by his

exceptionally close engagement with Arab culture and individuals (Note 2).

Lawrence's historical legacy is complex, ambiguous and resistant to easy categorisation. Lawrence worked within the highly politicised organizations of the British foreign office (the 'Arab Bureau') and the British military Headquarters in Cairo, and yet he cultivated an actively non military academic persona. He was a skilled linguist and possessed a superb memory – but his account of his political and military exploits in Seven Pillars of Wisdom is written as a highly stylised quasi-fictional 'romance' packed with incident - beatings and torture at the hands of the Turks, political executions and feats of superhuman endurance – several of which have been shown to be fictional or quasi fictional constructs (Asher 1999, p. 348). Lawrence was an accomplished guerrilla leader, but was in many senses the antithesis of the 'man of action'. He adopted elements of Arab dress and culture and yet was demonstrably part of the British Imperial project – and the figure we now know as 'Lawrence of Arabia' has been fabricated and constructed upon successive layers of wartime propaganda, myth-making (much of which was generated by Lawrence himself) and hagiography. Briefly stated the Lawrence myth is that a junior British officer 'led' the revolt of irrational and politically and militarily disorganized tribesman against Turkish colonial oppression; that his success in doing so can be attributed to his uniquely charismatic leadership, and that he was responsible for igniting the political consciousness that underpinned the revolt against the despotic rule of the Turks. Whilst Lawrence undoubtedly made a major contribution to the defeat of the Turks, the public figure that came to be known as 'Lawrence of Arabia' has its origins in the production of newsreel propaganda whose purpose was to engage the support of American cinema audiences as the US entered the First World War. Whilst these contrasting elements continue to fascinate biographers and contemporary British observers of the Middle East (Korda, 2010; BBC, 2010), they ignore the specific part played by Lawrence as a propagandist for both Arab and imperial causes. They also pay insufficient attention to Lawrence's legacy as a strategic thinker and innovator in military organization.

2.3 Lawrence as a Political Officer and Military 'Advisor'

Lawrence joined the British Army in 1916. His professional life as a junior officer in the British Army was centred on the General Headquarters (henceforth GHQ) in Cairo where he worked as an interpreter responsible, among other things for systemising the translation of Arab place names on campaign maps. He cultivated the persona of an Oxford classicist who read, wrote and spoke fluent Greek and Latin. He also showed a strong antipathy to the dominant military culture. He was physically slight, wore his hair long, his uniform was unkempt, and he wore no regimental cap badges – these outward signs of Lawrence's innate bohemianism would have been anathema to an officer class steeped in regimental tradition, hierarchy and the certainties of a global Empire at the zenith of its power. This power had not, however gone unchallenged by the rival powers facing the British empire in the Middle East. The Turks had joined with the Germans and the Austrians against the allies. They sought to consolidate their centuries- long occupation of the Arabian Peninsula. British strategists feared a Turko-German inspired jihad sparked by mujahadiyyn in both India and Egypt (Note 3). British commanders thus had every reason to dislodge the Turks from their bases in Syria, and Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) and to neutralise threats to Suez or India.

Lawrence's entry into what was considered to be a strategically vital theatre of British operation in the Hejaz area of Western Arabia (Note 4) was accomplished by means of deft political footwork and a finely judged subversion of the military bureaucracy in Cairo (Wilson, 1989; Asher, 1999). He managed to secure a secondment to the newly formed Arab Bureau (a political outpost and centre of intelligence gathering for the British foreign office), became editor of the highly regarded Arab Bulletin, and in late 1916 spent his annual leave sailing down the Red Sea in the company of Ronald Storrs, a renowned linguist, scholar and senior officer of the Bureau. Lawrence and Storrs landed at the port of Rabegh whereupon they learnt that negotiations between the British and the powerful Hashemite dynasty had all but broken down. The head of this dynasty was Sharif Hussain the Emir of Mecca, an important as representative of the caliphate and a political appointee representing a formal (but by no means unconditional) accord with the Turks, who maintained a large garrison in the town. The Sharif was assisted by three sons (Feisal and Abdallah and Ali) each of whom were field commanders and political leaders in their own right. The beginnings of the revolt were already underway when Lawrence arrived in the Hejaz. It was Abadallah, and not Lawrence who formed the idea that scattered desert tribes could be aligned in a general rising that would drive out the Turks. And desert tribesmen had already seen that the weakness of the Turks lay in the tracks of the Hejaz railway. Lawrence and Storrs learnt from the political officer at Rabegh that there was an almost complete lack of information on Turkish dispositions and movements in this area of the peninsula. Lawrence saw that there was a need for a field officer that could coordinate joint operations, engage in political liaison with potential insurgents and gather intelligence on behalf of GHQ. Lawrence and Storrs went on to open negotiations with the Hashemites and their shifting coalition of

tribes, many of whom were antagonised by the presence of foreigners. Whilst the precise emphasis of different biographical and historical sources varies we can discern the multidirectional consequences of Lawrence's political manoeuvrings as he moved from the role of an intelligence officer based in Cairo to that of a political officer working 'in theatre'. On meeting Lawrence and Storrs Feisal appealed for the landing of a large British force. But this was opposed by his brother Abdallah on the grounds that the presence of large numbers of Christians would undermine the Hashemite cause in the eyes of strongly Islamicised Bedu and other desert tribesmen. The staff officers of GHQ were themselves opposed to a landing on the grounds that this would commit large quantities of men and war materiel in a fruitless campaign in an extremely difficult physical environment many of whose basic geographical and topographical features were unmapped. GHQ was however persuaded to support Arab insurgence through the use of specialist advisors, technical personnel and the provision of military hardware.

One prominent feature of these joint actions is the extensive use of advanced military technologies. The 1990 (Penguin Modern Classic) edition of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom shows detail from 'Deraa', a painting by the war artist Stuart Reed. The painting shows is a large British Handley Page bomber plane surrounded by a disorderly stampede of sword-wielding Arab horsemen in traditional dress – a quintessentially orientalist image of an advanced technical civilisation confronting a band of disorganized and uncomprehending primitives. However a close reading of the historical and biographical sources suggests a quite different interpretation of how new technology was used in the revolt. Abdallah followed the broader contours of the war in Europe in Arab newspapers. He and Feisal also made frequent use of telegraphy and telephones (Lawrence's appointment as a military advisor to Feisal was secured when the latter telegrammed GHQ secured his attachment to the Hashemites). Here we can discern some clear evidence of cultural borrowing and exchange. Arab field commanders quickly grasped the benefits Western technical advances in signals telegraphy, electric detonation, lightweight artillery, machine guns, aeroplanes and motorised transport. They lobbied the British for their deployment in joint operations whenever possible. The theme of borrowing can be further examined in Lawrence's adoption of Arab dress. Michael Asher has argued that many tribesmen associated conventional Khaki uniform with the Turks. Wearing Arab dress was, firstly a mark of obeisance and one way of assuaging the anti Christian sentiments of desert tribesman. The splendour of a Sharif's robes represented a second more specific loyalty and identification with the Hashemite royal family. Arab dress functioned, thirdly as effective disguise as it had done since the time of the Richard Burtons exploration of Arabia in the mid 19th century. Finally Arab dress was perfectly adapted to desert conditions. The headdress could be used as a mask against sandstorms, as a device for straining water or as a cloth for binding wounds (Asher, 1999). Lawrence's adoption of Arab dress was thus a highly selective form of appropriation that followed a number of distinct political, cultural and practical logics.

We can now make some further observations about Lawrence's political role in the Arab revolt. It is important to take note of the socially, politically variegated character of the uprising. The revolt was neither politically homogenised and nor was it confined to military engagements in the desert. It was fought out in crowded towns and cities as well as remote deserts. Its leadership included town dwellers and farmers as well as desert tribesmen, the momentum for self determination embraced political radicals as well as conservative/traditionalists as exemplified by the Hashemites. Lawrence's support for the cause of was heavily slanted towards the latter. Lawrence was both an Arab sympathiser and an imperialist whose idea of Arab independence turned on the idea of small semi autonomous states that could be 'watched over' by the Imperial government in Egypt. His idea of self determination was consistently tilted in favour traditional and conservative elements in Arab society. Asher records that Lawrence 'distrusted the politically opinionated and intellectually gifted Abdallah', preferring to negotiate with the more impressionable Feisal. He was constantly balancing British military and propaganda imperatives with his emotional and political attachment to the Hashemites (Note 5). Thus, when Arab forces entered the Red Sea port of Wehj in 1917, the British military establishment at GHQ believed that this was due solely to the actions of the Royal Navy and not to joint action with Arab forces. Lawrence saw the need for a need for an Arab military and propaganda success, but found this difficult to reconcile with the broader strategic disposition of British forces. Feisal wanted to mount an assault on the garrison town of Medina, a key point on the Hejaz railway – whilst this would have been a major success for the Arabs it would have dislodged some 12,000 Ottoman troops, thus confounding British plans for a large scale offensive in the north of the country. Lawrence successfully advised against the idea of a direct attack on the town but nevertheless began to be troubled by the dilemma of 'doing right by the Arabs' whilst maintaining his duty as British political officer. Lawrence's main political objective not to defeat the Turks by ensuring a rapid Arab advance on Damascus but to slow the Arab forces in order that they could act in concert with the conventional British forces as they advanced from Egypt through Palestine and into Syria. Towards the end of

the campaign GHQ supplied Lawrence with large quantities of gold to distribute among politically compliant tribal leaders in the north of the country. Lawrence spent some weeks in early 1918 gathering intelligence on how different elements of the Arab population were likely to respond to the impending British advance. This was seen as a major intelligence success by GHQ but it is not mentioned in Seven Pillars of Wisdom. The famous attack on the port of Aqaba (immortalised by David Lean in the film Lawrence of Arabia) was specifically designed to divert Arab forces away from Damascus and to strengthen the British right flank against possible Turkish incursions. Lawrence was at one point nearly shot as a spy when discovered by the Arab nationalist Nasib Al-Bakri, who confronted him with incriminating documents that showed the British strategic deception. The documentary record shows Lawrence negotiating Arab control of different towns as the joint advance progressed. And yet by the end of the 1919 peace conference it had become apparent that the Arab cause had been sacrificed to British and French interests. The nationalists were suppressed by both powers, the Arab press was suppressed and French was substituted for Arabic in law courts and schools.

How can we capture the essence of Lawrence's involvement in the Arab revolt? Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, often regarded as a work of literature, is also Lawrence's political testament. The first chapter describes the effect of living and working for months as a solitary field officer during the campaign:

'I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe to their beliefs, but charged by duty to lead them forward and to develop to the highest any movement of theirs profitable to England in her war. If I could not assume their character, I could at least conceal my own, and pass amongst them without evident friction, neither a discord nor a critic but an unnoticed influence...' 'In my case the efforts of these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes...'At the same time I could not take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. I had dropped one form and not taken on another.... with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. Such detachment came at times to a man exhausted by prolonged physical effort and isolation. His body plodded on mechanically, while his reasonable self left him, and from without looked down critically on him, wondering what that futile lumber did and why. Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near to a man who could see things through the veils of two customs, two educations, two environments.

This passage can be read as a highly stylised meditation on the existential costs of Lawrence's life as a solitary envoy in the Hejaz but it can also be read as a disingenuous attempt to obscure the politically hybridised consequences of his own actions. Lawrence was not 'sent' to help the Arabs to the contrary he was a politically astute operator who engineered his own insertion into this strategically vital theatre of operations. Lawrence developed extraordinary close personal ties with Feisal and other Arab commanders in the field but he could, as we have seen, turn his role as mediator to local Arab advantage or to serve the broader strategic goals of the British. During the early part of the campaign he was able to carve out substantial room for manoeuvre in relation to the former whilst in the closing stages of the campaign Lawrence was more obviously working in favour of the latter. Lawrence enjoyed the advantage of superb linguistic and negotiating skills; these were buttressed by his close knowledge of the broader Anglo/French strategic intentions and by his access to the huge material and military resources that could be deployed by GHQ. Ostensibly 'collaborative' partnerships with Arab commanders in the field were thus underpinned by more or less systemic form of colonial domination, even if the precise contours of the encounter were subject to considerable variation over time.

2.4 Lawrence as an Innovator in Military Organization and Strategy

Thus far the paper has shown the politically and organizationally hybridised ways in which Lawrence mediated between British imperial interests and the Arab struggle for independence. Whilst this period of Lawrence's life has been extensively worked over by biographers and historians, elements of hagiography and mythogeny have persisted, and Lawrence continues to be seen as a crusading liberator (Korda, 2011). This obscures the nature of Lawrence's engagement in the Arab struggle and it also obscures the important question of how we should understand the longer term significance of Lawrence's work in the field of military strategy and organisation. Three aspects of this are of particular importance for this paper. The first is that Lawrence mixed modern military technology (particularly signals telegraphy, motorised transport and explosive devices) with traditional forms of warfare, notably the fast raiding techniques of local Bedu, Ageyl and Howeitat tribesmen, using highly mobile, lightly armed forces of hand-picked men against Turkish installations and fixed positions. A second feature of Lawrence's guerrilla war was that this was orchestrated by aligning the actions of autonomous units with longer term British war aims and objectives. A third feature was that Lawrence used the technical and communications infrastructure of the enemy–telegraph lines railways and bridges–as a way of exerting

disproportionate power of disruption and offensive action. Guerrilla action against large and well defended conventional forces was not unprecedented at the time of these operations and nor were they unique to the deserts of Arabia (Afghanistan offers some instructive 19th, 20th and 21st century examples) – but Lawrence was the first to integrate the above elements into a systematic military doctrine (Brown, 2005).

The allied military disaster at Gallipoli demonstrated that the Turks were tenacious and skilled defensive engineers capable of defending fortified positions. In 1916 (i.e. at a relatively early point the revolt) Lawrence records that he was overcome by fever in a remote desert encampment. Here Lawrence had what he describes as a series of visionary insights in which he saw the struggle to occupy the garrison town of Medina and other fixed points on the Hejaz railway as a strategic error (Asher 1999, pp. 204–225). Lawrence saw that disproportionate tactical and strategic advantages could be gained by continuing what might be termed a war of irresolution in which final victory was deferred in favour of near-permanent climate of disruption and uncertainty created by guerrilla action. Explosives were deployed against bridges and other key points, not so much for their materially destructive capacities as for their effect in diverting resources from strategically important sites of engagement between conventional forces. Lawrence's visionary concept of irregular warfare was that semi-autonomous units could function not as an organization but as 'an influence' or as 'an idea' that was ubiquitous and without form drifting about 'like a gas'. Lawrence was prescient in seeing that this would be a war not against men but against objects, machines, technical infrastructure and installations. The vast spaces of the desert offered a uniquely advantageous strategic medium in which freedom of movement was guaranteed independent of bases or fixed positions. Thus, the principles of conventional military hierarchy and standing armies were overturned and superseded by a war of diffusion and movement. Whilst the latter differed markedly from the industrialised warfare then being practiced on the battlefields of Europe, modern communications, aviation and weaponry were a central feature, a fact that was explicitly recognised by Arab field commanders and political leaders (Lawrence 1935; Asher 1999). It was also founded on the principle of 'centralised decentralisation'–local action was interleaved with the strategic designs of the British military and diplomatic centres of power in Cairo and London. Complex hybrids, deconstruction of military routines and modes of borrowing should thus bulk large in any serious analysis of Lawrence's military thinking.

Key elements of Lawrence's thinking on irregular warfare were themselves borrowed and subjected to further refinement and elaboration during the Second World War. The British defence of Egypt in the early 1940s drew heavily on the orientalist tradition as the military authorities recruited geographers, linguists and desert explorers to form specialised reconnaissance units that could operate in the Western and Libyan deserts. These units tended to downplay the established rigidities of military hierarchies, emphasising the need for small self contained groups of specialist personnel adept in the arts of sabotage, communications and desert navigation. Much of what was practiced by the Special Air Service (SAS) was directly borrowed from Lawrence. Technical refinements in the use of motorised transport, air support and radio communications were added to the basic principles of mobility, tactical surprise and the maximisation of uncertainty. These units continued the practice of attacking objects and vulnerable infrastructures, notably aircraft and airfields. Operationally decentralised means (i.e. highly mobile and semi autonomous units) were once again used as a means of expediting highly centralised strategic objectives (Note 6).

One theme that emerges from the history of 20th century irregular warfare is that resistance to occupying forces was most effective in physical environments where regular forces found it difficult to operate (e.g. the deserts of the Middle East, the mountains of Bosnia, Northern Italy, or Greece). Resistance movements were much less effective in the heavily populated or built up areas of Western Europe (see Judt 2005 for a discussion). The British government did however see an urgent political and military need to support resistance in these areas. New variants on the theme of irregular war appeared as agents of the newly formed Special Operations Executive (SOE) were dropped into France (Note 7). Here the use of small independent cells and networks (Fr: reseaux) was refined and used to prosecute a 'terrorist' war of sabotage and random attacks on the occupying forces (Note 8). The maintenance of self contained cells and communications networks was enabled by technological advances in radio communications–even if these were frequently chaotic and penetrated by a large and well resourced counter-intelligence organization (Note 9).

The techniques and modes of operation pioneered by the British in the First and Second World Wars were used in a variety of colonial struggles against colonial rule notably in Kenya, in Palestine, and in Malaya. Irregular warfare offered lightly armed insurgents a means of fighting large technologically sophisticated enemy as shown in Vietnam and more recently in Afghanistan. The insight that technical and communications infrastructures can be used as a weapon in this 'asymmetric' warfare has an obvious resonance with the attacks of 9/11. Contemporary accounts of the latter are replete with of references to networks, cellular forms and intangible

enemy (Clark, 2004; Pilar, 2004; Langdon, 2004) and Munro (2010) equates Lawrence's 'nomadism' with the 'end' of bureaucracy and the rise of the 'network society'.

3. Discussion

The paper has used the case of T.E. Lawrence as a way of uncovering the British imperial involvement in Arab political and military struggles during the First World War. We have re-examined the idea that Lawrence 'led' the Arab revolt of irrational and politically disorganized tribesman against Turkish colonial oppression. Lawrence was a propagandist for both the Arabs and the British. His political allegiance to the Hashemite dynasty was apparent throughout the revolt – but he also made systematic use of misinformation, strategic deception and political manipulation. Lawrence thus prefigures the contemporary practice of directing special envoys or 'military advisors' to engage closely with local insurgents as a means of defeating a common enemy, thus allowing imperial 'power at a distance' to be projected into local settings (see Curtis (2010) for further examples). The Lawrence myth underplays the fact that the revolt had already gained considerable momentum before Lawrence himself entered the Hejaz in 1916. It also underplays the politically sophisticated, variegated character of the Arab independence movement. Our conceptual framework has emphasised the political and cultural complexity of the colonial encounter. We have also emphasised the ways in which complex forms of reciprocity and exchange have given rise to new hybrid modes of action and organization. Following Prasad (2003a) we see these hybrid developments as an alternative to the dichotomies of east against west, or central control versus autonomous action. We have offered some insights into the politically hybridised character of Lawrence's engagement with his Arab collaborators. We should end our discussion with some thoughts on how the notion of organizational hybridity helps to shed light on the question of how we should understand the longer term significance of Lawrence's work in the field of military strategy and organisation. Lawrence was prescient in envisioning a war in which highly dispersed activists would fight a war of irresolution, using the enemy's own technological infrastructure as a weapon that could be turned to advantage. This overturned the established military orthodoxy of Clausewitz, mixing premodern forms of warfare with new technologies of radio telegraphy, explosive devices, air support and motorised transport. This suggests a radical deconstruction of military bureaucracy. However it should be remembered that Lawrence also worked in an overtly 'bureaucratic' context. His intelligence activities were heavily dependent on the political and logistical support of the British GHQ in Cairo and his actions were of direct benefit to the British war effort in Syria. Whilst there is a general tendency to argue that insurgent groups such as Al Quaeda and Hamas have adopted highly decentralised 'networked' organizational forms (Pillar, 2004; Clark, 2004; Langdon, 2003; Shapiro, 2005), it has also been argued that these groups have retained substantial elements of hierarchy both within and between cells (Carley, 2004) (Note 10). We should also note that the response to the sabotage activities of insurgent groups, (first seen in France during the 1940s) has been the creation of large, technologically sophisticated counter-insurgency organizations. Bamford and other authorities on present day surveillance bureaucracies (such as GCHQ in the UK and the NSA in the US) (Bamford, 2002; 2009) have expanded rapidly since the attacks of September 2001 (Note 11).

4. Conclusion

We have pursued two objectives in writing this paper. The first has been to engage in a small, but we would argue intellectually worthwhile act of historical recovery vis a vis T.E. Lawrence and the exercise of British imperial power in the Arab Middle East. We have also tried to develop the idea that the radically new forms of irregular warfare pioneered by Lawrence emerged from highly specific, yet cumulatively significant processes of cultural appropriation and exchange. These forms of reciprocity, exchange and hybridity can be opposed to the principle of dichotomisation (Prasad, 2003a, p. 155). Lawrence fought a highly effective war of mobility against the Turks. While there can be no doubt that this was a radically new departure from conventional 'war of position', Lawrence acted as a conduit for the projection of centralised diplomatic and military power during the Arab revolt. The master theme underpinning Lawrence's doctrine of irregular warfare is the use of decentralised means to realise centralised objectives – a theme that has resurfaced in contemporary academic debate on the 'networked' organizational forms found in Islamic groups such as Al-Quaeda and Hamas (Arquilla & Ronfeld, 1999; Shapiro, 2005).

As noted a major theme in this paper has been to engage in the task of historical recovery. We have challenged the tendency to view British irregular warfare and clandestine operations through the lens of imperial or post imperial fictions (Cannadine, 2010). The task of 'recovering' the legacy of T.E Lawrence is obscured by the very existence of the figure that we have come to know as 'Lawrence of Arabia'. The latter owes much to the tradition of imperial heroes of Kipling and Buchan, official propaganda and Lawrence's own role in constructing an image of himself as a crusading emir of the Arab revolt. Lawrence does, however, remain a major point of reference for examining the nature of the colonial encounter in the Middle East. His theories of irregular warfare

are also highly relevant to our understanding of the modern day 'war of irresolution' currently being waged by Islamic activists. Whilst this war has real and significant protagonists, victims and consequences, this is also an emblematic 'clash of civilisations' fought out between western values and the perception of an alien 'other' (Huntingdon, 1996). Whilst Lawrence can be understood as an avowedly 'anti-bureaucratic' iconoclast, he was also a consummate political 'insider' and a master of political manoeuvre within GHQ and the Arab bureau. As such he would have savoured the irony that the current war on terror has stimulated an unprecedented growth in the scale and reach of highly centralised counter-intelligence bureaucracies.

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Notes

Note 1. Lawrence also venerated the pre-rational pre modern world of the medieval craftsman and was himself something of an adept in the arts of brass-rubbing, stone carving carpentry, metalwork and print making.

Note 2. Lawrence formed a close relationship with a young Arab worker and scandalised his colleagues by displaying a sculpture of his naked form on the roof of the expedition lodgings at Carchemish.

Note 3. These developments would assume an added global significance as the colonial powers realised the vast oil reserves of the region. The *jihad* in question was central to the plot of John Buchan's novel *Greenmantle.* One of the peculiarities of 20th century British intelligence warfare is that some leading practitioners (such as John Buchan Ian Fleming, Graham Greene) also became prolific writers of spy fiction. Buchan, (who was appointed head of British propaganda and news management in 1916) saw that the images of the industrial scale carnage on the Western front held little or no appeal for North American newsreel audiences. It was Buchan who inspired the American journalist George Lowell to depict 'Lawrence of Arabia' against the highly photogenic desert backdrop of the Middle East.

Note 4. Lawrence's life as an orientalist scholar-soldier-diplomat was played out in the deserts of Western and northern Arabia. Lawrence was also familiar with the urban centres of Beirut, Basra, Aleppo and Damascus-cities whose names remind us that the projection of British imperial power in the early 20th century has had lasting consequences. Then as now, the spiritual centre of the Arabian peninsula was Mecca, a destination for thousands of Islamic pilgrims. The Turkish occupiers had built a railway running southwards from Damascus in the heavily populated north down through the Hejaz in the west of the peninsula. The Hejaz is comprised of a coastal strip that sits between the Red Sea and a hinterland of deserts mountains and gorges (or *wadis*). British naval forces controlled all movements between Suez and the port cities of Rabegh, Jidda and Wehj. Arab forces moved north towards Damascus and, under Lawrence's political direction, acted in concert with conventional units of the British army lead by General Allenby as it advanced from Egypt through Palestine and into Syria.

Note 5. Asher records that 'The British looked at the revolt through his eyes, and his close liaison with Feisal meant that that the Arabs saw the British largely from his perspective'. Lawrence was thus 'the pivot, the uncrowned King of Arabia' (Asher, 1999: 215).

Note 6. The soldier-diplomat Fitzroy Maclean (1911-1996) wrote a politically sophisticated account of the irregular war being fought by the British during WW2. Whilst talk of 'suicide raids' was actively discouraged by senior members of the SAS, there can be little doubt about the risks incurred by those involved in deep

infiltration operations against superior conventional forces. Maclean describes a sabotage raid on the Libyan port of Benghazi in 1941. McLean sent a radio signal on the eve of the raid advising GHQ in Cairo that his unit had been discovered by the Italian occupiers, only to be informed that it should 'proceed as planned'. The raid was launched next day before being abandoned in the face of heavy casualties. It was only later that Mclean discovered that the real purpose of the raid was a diversionary foil for a much larger offensive action. The buoyant reports that later appeared in the British press bore little or no resemblance to McLean's experience of what had occurred during the engagement.

Note 7. McLean's role as a Churchill's special envoy to the Yugoslav partisan leader Josip Tito provides some striking parallels with Lawrence's activities in Arabia. Once again a young officer is detached from regular service to engage closely with an 'alien' ideology (soviet inspired Communism) in a difficult physical environment (the mountains of Bosnia) against powerful forces of occupation (the German and Italian armies). Small forces were used to create strategic advantage (the diversion of large numbers of men from the fight against the Russians on the eastern front) and close collaborative engagement with leading insurgents was used to as a means of addressing much larger questions of foreign policy (was Tito a Soviet functionary or a 'non aligned' independent Socialist?).

Note 8. Here the link between military organization, radio communications, and the control/coordination of agents on the ground grew increasingly close. Recent years have seen unprecedented access to archival sources on the signals intelligence operations of Bletchley Park (Grey and Sturdy 2010) and to those of SOE, an organization whose very existence was denied up until the late 1970s. Here again guerrilla warfare and resistance to a common enemy was framed by contending elements of quasi-autonomy, networks and strong control exercised by a central authority. And here again fact and fiction means and ends were mixed in ways that have left a complex and ambiguous historical/ political legacy.

Note 9. Helm (1999) shows that field agents working in France were exposed to extremely hazardous operating conditions as they faced security checks, electronic detection or betrayal by collaborators. Helms investigation of the archives has uncovered the *de facto* expendability of SOE agents, particularly female field operatives whose lack of regimental affiliation gave them none of the legal protection enjoyed by regular soldiers. These aspects have been sanitised by the heavily stylised, and overtly propagandistic films such as *Carve her Name with Pride* (1956) in which the actress Virginia McKenna played the agent Juliette Swabo.

Note 10. Shapiro (2005) argues that much of the current literature fails to distinguish between these dimensions, treating groups as though they were either decentralised or networked or hierarchical and compartmentalised.

Note 11. There is a need for more social science investigation and analysis of these intelligence gathering organizations, not least because of the recent tendency to treat these as 'rational' purveyors of information (see for example Pepper 2010; Omand 2010).

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