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**DESERT GUERRILLAS: PSYCHOLOGICAL,
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE BEDOUIN WHICH LEND THEMSELVES
TO IRREGULAR WARFARE**

**A Monograph
by
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Infantry**



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and Economic Characteristics of the Bedouin
Which Lend Themselves to Irregular Warfare

by

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ABSTRACT

DESERT GUERRILLAS: PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BEDOUIN WHICH LEND THEMSELVES TO IRREGULAR WARFARE by MAJ Thomas A. Dempsey, USA, 46 pages.

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I. Introduction

This paper will examine those characteristics which enable Bedouin tribes to provide irregular forces to augment conventional and unconventional military operations in Southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. It will also consider how a U.S. contingency force could exploit these factors to its own advantage. While the study is limited to Southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula, the influence of the local population in any theater of operations should be considered in contingency planning and execution.

While irregular forces have been utilized frequently in past military conflicts, they achieved special prominence during Allenby's Palestine Campaign under the leadership of T. E. Lawrence. Beginning as an economy of force effort to tie down Turkish garrisons in the Hejaz, the irregular forces of the Arab Revolt played a key role under Lawrence in Allenby's final offensive in September of 1918[1]. Their successes in cutting Turkish communications and in pursuing the withdrawing Turkish forces demonstrated the potential of irregular forces when employed in a suitable role in the appropriate circumstances[2]. This potential merits careful consideration in light of current U.S. contingency planning for the Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia.

Current shortfalls within the U. S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) force structure and resource constraints within its Area of Responsibility (AOR) point to a vital need for augmentation, which irregular forces may partially satisfy. During the initial phases of a contingency, USCENTCOM will be

operating with very austere forces in an immature theater. Three to four weeks are required to move three combat divisions to the Arabian Gulf; considerably longer to provide the sustainment base in theater necessary for their employment[3]. The primary contingencies portray most, if not all, combat and combat support units as being employed against a Soviet threat projected from the North Caucasus, Transcaucasus and Turkistan Military Districts[4]. Should a threat develop to the critical air bases or theater army support facilities which would be located in the Arabian Peninsula, assets available for commitment in this area will be meager. Irregular Bedouin forces, locally recruited and employed to detect and help counter the rear area threat, can act as a force multiplier for the USCENTCOM rear battle. In addition to this rear battle role, Bedouin irregulars may, in the appropriate circumstances, provide critical additional combat forces at times and places where employment of regular U.S. or host nation units is difficult or not feasible.

II. Irregular Forces and Their Employment

For purposes of this paper, irregular forces are defined as forces locally recruited in the AOR, but not part of an organized national military unit trained for conventional operations. The latter point distinguishes the employment of locally recruited irregulars from combined operations with the national forces of an ally or host nation.

Irregular forces have been employed historically in four distinct ways: for intelligence gathering, in security operations, in raiding, and rarely (under Lawrence in Palestine, for example) for deep operations as part of a conventional campaign. Each of the four methods of employment exploited certain characteristics of irregulars. These characteristics provided advantages over the regular units available, or enhanced their effectiveness.

The U.S. Army routinely recruited American Indians to gather intelligence as scouts during the Indian Wars. General George Crook stated that "I always try to get Indian scouts, because with them scouting is the business of their lives. They learn all the signs of a trail as a child learns the alphabet; it becomes an instinct." [5] General Crook realized that irregular forces operating in their home territory possess a detailed knowledge of the area which is invaluable to the intelligence collection effort. Irregular forces can also provide key contacts with the local population, as Vladimir Peniakoff discovered in setting up a British intelligence network in North Africa in 1942. Employing local Arab irregulars, his network extended from Alexandria to Benghazi, providing detailed information on Axis order of battle, movement and logistics [6]. Peniakoff found that irregular forces drawn from the local area typically maintain their contacts and acquaintances among the local communities. The irregulars are privy as a matter of course to the rumors, news, and observations of the local people,

yielding critical information which would not otherwise be available.

The Hagana-- forerunner of the Israeli Defense Force-- is an example of an irregular force employed in security operations. Recruited from among the Jewish settlements in Palestine, the Hagana provided local defense against Arab infiltration and raiding. The system developed by the Hagana illustrates several advantages enjoyed by irregulars when employed as local security forces. Being responsible for the defense of the same communities in which they live and work, these forces are available 24 hours a day and require very little besides arms and ammunition to sustain themselves. Their knowledge of the area around their respective settlements is extensive, giving them a tactical advantage over attackers. Their motivation is the protection of their own families and possessions, which generates a willingness to stand and fight not usually seen among irregular forces.

While it takes advantage of local familiarity with terrain and requires minimal resources, employment in security operations also sacrifices mobility and initiative by tying the irregular forces to specific locales. As a result, it tends to maximize the vulnerability of the irregulars, as Orde Wingate quickly discerned in the case of the Hagana, telling the Hagana leaders:

You Jews of the settlements have been fighting a defensive war against the Arabs for too long. It will not save your lives or your settlements. You will never put down the enemy that way. We must try a new kind of war...[7]

The new kind of war that Wingate was advocating was one of the most common forms of irregular warfare: raiding.

Raiding as a form of irregular warfare was common in the border areas during the American Civil War. In Missouri and Kansas irregulars from both sides burned farms and even whole towns, looted supply depots and trains, attacked isolated outposts and ambushed parties of both soldiers and civilians.[8] Another example of raiding was seen in French Indochina, where Colonel Roger Trinquier organized in 1951 the Groupements de Commandos Mixte Aeroportes (GCMA). Made up of highland tribesmen led by French officers and NCO's, this force raided Viet Minh supply lines and rear areas, challenging the communists for control of the countryside.[9] The raiding characterized by these examples avoids enemy strength, ignores specific terrain objectives, and seeks targets of opportunity.

The motivation of the irregular raiding party is generally the self-interest of its members. Raiders are typically seeking loot of one sort or another, as well as personal prestige within the social group. Sometimes the raiders seek vengeance against the tribe or community being raided. Raiding parties are usually highly mobile and unpredictable. Lacking central direction, a specific focus or an easily recognizable center of gravity, raiding campaigns are extremely difficult to counter with conventional forces. As a result, conventional operations to counter raiding campaigns have frequently tied down regular forces out of all proportion to the actual numbers of irregulars.

On the other hand, the lack of direction and focus makes it very difficult to incorporate this sort of raiding into a conventional campaign. The raids in Kansas and Missouri during the Civil War were not, in general, a coordinated series of actions directed at a particular target or objective. Colonel Trinquier, despite the effectiveness of his raiders, was unable to employ them successfully in conjunction with the French effort to relieve the besieged French forces at Dien Bien Phu.[10] T. E. Lawrence was one of the few men to transcend this limitation, employing his irregular forces as a major component of the conventional campaign to drive the Turks out of Palestine.

The implications of Lawrence's experience in Palestine are still a subject of controversy today. Although his campaigns will be treated in greater detail later in this paper, it will suffice here to note that his irregular forces penetrated into the enemy's operational depths, secured key objectives, helped to unhinge the Turkish center of gravity, and participated in the pursuit and exploitation following the defeat of the Turkish Army. As Lawrence discovered during his campaigns, irregulars in their own territory enjoy significant mobility and sustainment advantages over conventional forces. These advantages can create opportunities for operational maneuver by irregular forces, including strikes into the operational depth of the enemy rear. It was such an opportunity that Lawrence took advantage of in Palestine. His employment of irregular forces for deep strikes in support of a conventional campaign emphasizes the potential value of irregular warfare. It is this potential value which

makes the suitability of the Bedouin for irregular warfare an issue of great significance for U.S. contingency operations in Southwest Asia and the Arabian Peninsula.

III. The Bedouin Warrior and His Society

The characteristics of Bedouin society facilitate the recruitment and employment of Bedouin forces for irregular warfare. The Bedouin tribes, which populate the Arabian Peninsula and much of the Levant, have developed methods of survival in a harsh environment. Their culture, social system and desert tracking skills are ideally suited to the collection of intelligence in this environment. The extensive Bedouin knowledge of local terrain, climate, hydrology and demographics provides them with a significant mobility advantage over non-Bedouin forces. This advantage is enhanced by Bedouin traditions of austere self-reliance, diminishing their dependence on elaborate logistical support networks. The rigors of life in the desert produce effective leaders at all levels, and generate a form of social discipline and cohesion which enhances the ability to sustain hardship. At the same time, a tradition of raiding and tribal warfare gives the Bedouin a common basis of military experience appropriate to irregular warfare. The exploitation of this experience is aided by Bedouin traditions of hospitality. These traditions create opportunities for influencing key leaders to support recruitment of irregular forces from among their

respective tribes. The recruitment effort will be facilitated by the continuous need for hard currency which is typical of the Bedouin economy. All of these characteristics testify to the great potential of the Bedouin for irregular warfare.

Past experience in the Arabian Peninsula has demonstrated the effectiveness of Bedouin irregular forces. King Abdul Aziz Ibn Sa'ud employed Bedouin irregulars to unify Saudi Arabia prior to the First World War, to defeating Turkish regulars as well as internal opposition. His experiences confirm that the characteristics of Bedouin society are particularly suited to irregular warfare. The previously mentioned campaigns of T. E. Lawrence in the Hejaz and Palestine also utilized Bedouin irregulars, and contributed to the decisive victory of the Allies in that theater during the First World War. More recently, the British Special Air Service (SAS) recruited Bedouin irregulars between 1971 and 1976 to assist in suppressing the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman. The SAS confirmed the experiences of Ibn Sa'ud and Lawrence, finding the Bedouin tribes of Oman to be a crucial element in the prosecution of the war for the Dhofar.

The Bedouin population in the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant represents a critical resource whose potential has been demonstrated historically. Developing the plans and methods to exploit this resource in support of U.S. operations in Southwest Asia and the Arabian Gulf should be a priority in the Unified Commands charged with responsibilities in this area.

IV. The Characteristics of Bedouin Society:

Implications for Irregular Warfare

The traditional characteristics of Bedouin society support employment of Bedouin irregulars in gathering intelligence, security operations, raiding, and for the conduct of deep operations.

Bedouin social customs and tribal structure are ideally suited to the collection of intelligence over wide geographic areas. The tradition of hospitality obliges the Bedouin traveller to exchange news with other Bedouin encountered in the desert. Musil in his seminal study of the Rwala Bedouins states:

It takes some time to tell of the raids undertaken and the booty obtained, of pastures, watering places, etc., as these accounts, 'ulum, in the desert take the place of newspapers and the welfare of the traveller or even of the whole clan often depends on them... If the travelers ride close by a camp, there is always someone there who goes out to stop them and learn what they know...[11]

Wilfred Thesiger observed the same thing during his trips through the Empty Quarter, remarking that "it was extraordinary how widely news travels in the desert." [12] This is a natural intelligence network, spanning hundreds of miles and providing extensive and generally accurate information of events in the desert. Almost everything is of interest to the Bedouin, but the activity of foreigners in these seldom-visited parts of the world creates a sensation. Thesiger's presence in the Empty Quarter, for example, provoked comment and controversy wherever he went. [13] The presence of Spatanaz, conventional military forces, or even unfamiliar tribes or individuals would become

common knowledge among the local Bedouin very quickly. The strangers' activities would be followed very closely as a matter of course.

Bedouin tracking skills combined with their remarkable powers of observation provide additional advantages in the collection of intelligence. It is difficult for a Westerner to credit the extent of Bedouin expertise in this area. Thesiger relates an incident from his travels that illustrates the point:

A few days later we passed some tracks...much blurred by the wind. Sultan turned to a gray-bearded man who was noted as a tracker and asked him whose tracks these were... the man answered, "They were Awamir. There are six of them. They have raided the Junuba on the southern coast and taken three of their camels. They have come here from Sahma and watered at Mughshin. They passed here ten days ago." We had seen no Arabs for seventeen days... On our return we met some Bait Kathir...they told us that six Awamir had raided the Junuba, killed three of them, and taken three of their camels.[14]

Thesiger saw many other examples of these skills. They are not uncommon among Bedouin, but are on the contrary a prerequisite for survival in the desert. They would lend a dimension to a Bedouin intelligence collection network which could not be duplicated by conventional means.

The Bedouin have extensive knowledge of terrain, climate, hydrology and local demographics, giving them a significant mobility advantage over non-Bedouin forces. Survival in the Arabian Deserts requires an unerring sense of direction and ability to navigate, as well as detailed knowledge of sources of sustenance and water for both men and livestock. Bruce Ingham, having studied Northeastern Arabian Bedouins in detail and lived

among them during 1977 and 1978, noted that they "have a remarkable knowledge of topography and...are able to make accurate guesses from the sight of distant rainfall or lightning as to where grazing will be found." [15] Thesiger's extended travels in the most remote areas of the peninsula would have been impossible without his Bedouin guides' detailed knowledge of water sources, trafficability of terrain, local inhabitants and sources of supplies. The Bedouin travel freely through the forbidding sand mountains of the Empty Quarter as well as the vast quicksands of the Umm Al Samim, giving them a degree of mobility at the tactical and operational level which the most modern mechanized forces cannot match. [16]

The austerity of the Bedouin life style combined with a traditional emphasis on self-reliance minimizes the resources necessary to support Bedouin irregulars. This further enhances their mobility advantage over non-Bedouin forces. A Bedouin party is self-contained, carrying everything necessary for survival in the desert for extended periods. [17] Mounted on camels, the party can travel in the deepest desert, going up to seven days without food or water in order to traverse the long distances between wells. [18] In effect, the Bedouin operate naturally as "flying columns" in the tradition of Sherman and the French Colonial Army in North Africa. In fact, the French learned the technique from fighting desert nomads. Non-Bedouin forces, lacking knowledge of local water sources and means of sustainment in the desert, and not schooled in the harsh and exacting life of the Bedouin, must depend on elaborate logistics

systems operating over long and difficult lines of communications. Lack of detailed knowledge of the terrain and climate, and lack of experience in coping with the trafficability problems of the desert will further restrict non-Bedouin mobility relative to Bedouin forces.

The rigors of life in the desert have created a form of social discipline among the Bedouin which increases their ability to sustain hardship and facilitates the maintenance of group cohesion under the most trying conditions. Communal effort and cooperation are the keys to survival; provisions are the property of the entire party, and are shared equally, rationing being a way of life in the desert. According to Thesiger, to accept more food than his companion would be "inconceivable to a Bedu, for they are careful never to appear greedy, and quick to notice anyone who is." [19] Acceptance of hardship is expected, and individuals are judged based upon their mental and physical qualities in the face of danger. [20] The impact of this social discipline is found in a tendency for Bedouins to become more rather than less cohesive as they are placed under increasing levels of mental and physical stress. Feats of endurance which would be considered monumental to a conventional force are considered by the Bedouin to be routine. The results, in terms of the capabilities of a Bedouin force, can be significant. In 1910, Lieutenant Colonel G. E. Leachman accompanied a party of camel-mounted Bedouin across the heart of the Syrian Desert, travelling 540 miles in nine days, or an average of 60 miles a day, and subsisting entirely on the provisions carried with them

and on the meager water sources of the area.[21] This capacity to endure hardship, when combined with Bedouin traditions of raiding and tribal warfare, supplies critical advantages to an irregular force.

The traditions of raiding and tribal warfare give the Bedouin a common basis of military experience appropriate to irregular warfare. Concerning raids, Musil noted that "Every expedition of this kind has a leader...conspicuous for his prudence and bravery in time of war." [22] Members provide their own transport (horses and camels for raids covering short distances, only camels for longer raids), weapons and supplies. The leader takes great care to keep the raid's objective secret from all but his closest associates, to avoid warning the enemy. Scouts are employed in advance of the main force to watch for tracks of Bedouins, to look for camp sites, and eventually to locate the enemy's camp. Once the camp is located, the leader sends a reconnaissance party to determine the enemy tribe's strength and dispositions, the location of their livestock, and the location of other camps in the area which may assist them. The leader then makes his dispositions for the attack. Surprise is always sought, but

it is only on rare occasions that the enemy can be wholly taken by surprise, because the chief of every camp follows the rule of sending out riders on camels...to observe the country on all sides. They usually start at sunrise, ascend the highest hillocks, survey the neighborhood in all directions, and do not return until after sunset...[23]

The raid is most commonly aimed at capturing livestock and looting the enemy's encampment, if possible. Casualties are

avoided to the maximum extent possible, which is one of the reasons for prudence as a key characteristic of Bedouin leaders. Raiders withdraw in the face of enemy strength, and pursue when encountering weakness. Mobility is essential to success, and some of the raids by Yemeni tribesmen during Thesiger's travels in the Empty Quarter covered a thousand miles and lasted for two months.[24] The raiders are generally well armed, as are their enemies. Both Musil and Thesiger noted the prevalence of firearms among the Bedouin, their familiarity with the use of their weapons and maintenance, and the high esteem in which the best shots among the Bedouin are held. Musil states that "In the camp of every tribe an expert mechanic may be found, who can repair guns and manufacture cartridges." [25] Observing that the Bedouin "love taking rifles to pieces," Thesiger also found that "service" (i.e., military) rifles were highly valued and much sought after.[26] All of these aspects of tribal warfare support the employment of the Bedouin in an irregular role. Their careful scouting practices can be exploited in intelligence gathering and security operations, while raiding itself is a common form of irregular warfare. The long distances and extended duration of the larger raids also suggest a potential for deep operations in a more focused effort.

The harsh desert environment and the demands of tribal warfare develop effective leaders down to the lowest levels of the Bedouin tribe. Among the Bedouin, the survival of the group is largely dependent upon the quality of its leadership. Shaja'a, courage, and agdaam, audacity, are expected of Bedouin

leaders.[27] Prudence is also an essential characteristic in a society where hasty or ill-conceived decisions can have immediate and disastrous consequences. Positions of leadership are determined consensually based upon the leader's mu'ahalaat, demonstrated qualifications.[28] Those who fail to measure up to the demands of the environment and the expectations of their followers are displaced by more sagacious and forceful tribesmen. Referring to the Bedouin sheikh, Thesiger wrote the following:

He is merely the first among equals in a society where every man is intensely independent and quick to resent any hint of autocracy. His authority depends in consequence on the force of his own personality and on his skill in handling men. His position in the tribe, in fact, resembles that of the chairman of a committee meeting.[29]

Thesiger himself witnessed the consequence of a failure of leadership during his crossing of the Empty Quarter. Deep in the desert, exhausted and short of provisions, his party seemed on the verge of breaking up. The acknowledged leader of the party "was confused and bewildered, no longer self-reliant. He looked an old and broken man." [30] A non-Bedouin expedition probably would have perished. In the event, another, bolder member of the group emerged as the new leader, reorganized the party and successfully completed the crossing. The old leader returned home, his nerve and reputation gone. This is a hard school of leadership, where survival is the criterion of success and the sheikh or war leader must demonstrate his competence on a daily basis. It produces strong, resilient leaders accustomed to adversity, and well-suited to the command of irregular forces.

It will be necessary to win the trust and cooperation of these leaders in order to take advantage of their capabilities.

While the Bedouin tend to be suspicious of outsiders and especially of non-Muslims, the characteristics of Bedouin society provide ways to overcome these initially unfavorable attitudes. Bedouin traditions of generosity and hospitality offer one means with which to secure the cooperation of key Bedouin leaders and elders. Thesiger took advantage of these traditions on several occasions to overcome the hostility of local tribes. In a typical example, he identified, using the knowledge of his Bedouin guides, an important sheikh within the hostile tribe. Establishing his personal credibility with a letter of introduction from another sheikh known to the local leader, Thesiger made a generous gift to the initially unsympathetic sheikh. This impressed the Bedouin with Thesiger's generosity, and at the same time imposed an obligation upon the sheikh to respond in kind. Once this influential local leader had personally vouched for Thesiger and lent his prestige to Thesiger's visit, no further problems were encountered.[31] Identifying and influencing key elders and proven leaders in this way can exploit their capacity to affect the opinions and attitudes of their followers, allowing the non-Bedouin to overcome an initially chilly welcome and obtain access to the resources and manpower of the tribe.

The effectiveness of the techniques outlined in the previous example can be magnified by the persistent need for hard currency in the Bedouin economy. Despite their self-sufficiency in the

desert, the Bedouin require a variety of finished goods from the towns which can only be obtained for hard cash, and sometimes with great difficulty.[32] This is one reason why firearms and ammunition are so highly valued in the desert. The need for hard currency creates a willingness among the Bedouin to undertake enterprises on behalf of a non-Bedouin. Thesiger noted the practise among the towns and villages in Oman of hiring Bedouin tribesmen as "soldiers of fortune" on a temporary basis to protect their interests and assist them against other towns and villages.[33] Provision of steady wages should facilitate the recruitment of Bedouin irregulars, even more so the provision of high-quality firearms and ammunition not available from other sources.

Not all characteristics of Bedouin society support their recruitment and use as irregulars, and some of the positive characteristics have negative aspects. For example, while the independence of the individual Bedouin and the consensual nature of Bedouin society contribute to their self-sufficiency in the desert and to the development of leadership within the tribe, these characteristics can also have a negative effect on military operations involving Bedouin forces. Individual members of a Bedouin party feel free to leave whenever they believe their interests are not being served or their honor has been offended. Thesiger's crisis in the Empty Quarter, in addition to generating new leadership and a new, more cohesive party, also resulted in a smaller party as several of the Bedouin members abandoned the crossing attempt to return to their tribes.[34] While this did

not prevent a successful crossing, in a military operation where the size of the party is critical to its success it would have been far more serious. Especially important in this incident is the uncertainty evidenced in any undertaking involving the Bedouin. It is impossible to predict when problems of this sort may arise or how they will impact on the mission or objective of the operation. Closely related to the unpredictability of the individual Bedouin is the problem of tribal politics.

Tribal politics, like the actions of the individual Bedouin, are volatile and unpredictable, greatly increasing the friction involved in employment of Bedouin forces. The relationships between different tribes, and even between different clans or branches of the same tribe, affect every aspect of Bedouin life. These relationships change rapidly and are monitored on a continuous basis by the Bedouin themselves, but are seldom well-known (or not known at all) to the outside world. As a result, determining the influence of tribal politics on a particular operation is at best tentative, and is dependent upon reliable information from the Bedouin themselves. The consequences of ignoring tribal politics can be disastrous. Thesiger planned his route through the Najd without adequate consideration for these factors. His party was imprisoned by a powerful tribe in the area, which was hostile to the tribe of his guides.[35] It was only through the intervention of King Abdul Aziz Ibn Sa'ud himself that the party was released.

The relationship of the Bedouin tribes to local governments may create barriers to recruitment and employment of Bedouins as

irregular forces, especially if those governments are supporting U.S. operations. Maintaining authority over the principle Bedouin tribes continues to be a problem for most of the governments in the Peninsula. In the remote and ill-defined border areas, government control is tenuous and the borders themselves are frequently the subject of disputes. The Bedouin tribes in the border areas are an important factor in these disputes, and are the object of intense competition for influence on the part of national and local governments.[36] In these circumstances, any initiative involving the Bedouin tends to be viewed with great suspicion by all concerned. The potential effect of recruitment among the Bedouin must be examined carefully with a view towards the impact it may have on U.S. relations with the countries having an interest in the area.

No discussion of these issues would be complete without mentioning one of the more controversial questions with respect to the Bedouins: the degree to which modernization has affected the Bedouin life style as it has been described by authors like Musil and Thesiger. Some students of the area believe that modern technology and the changes wrought by the oil boom have all but destroyed traditional Bedouin society. Thesiger himself, after returning to the Peninsula in 1977 for a short visit, wrote bitterly about the destruction of the Bedouin social structure resulting from the introduction of modern technology to the desert.[37] Other authors have suggested that the impact of modernization has been overstated. Looking at the "life-cycle" of the Bedouin in 1978, Ingham writes:

This has been described in great detail by earlier writers at a time when western technology had not intervened to cause quite striking changes in their mode of life. However...[the] changes in fact affect mainly the type of flocks used, the main means of transport and the area over which grazing is possible while the basic nature of the life-cycle is to a large extent unchanged.[38]

Sandra Mackey's recently published commentary on conditions in Saudi Arabia notes the continuing prevalence of the Bedouin social structure, values and traditions among significant segments of Saudi society.[39] The principle Bedouin tribes continue to play a major role in the political geography of the region, and occupy much of the time and attention of the local governments.

Within the limitations discussed above, the characteristics of Bedouin society facilitate the employment of Bedouins as irregular forces. According to these characteristics, Bedouin society should produce hardened warriors and leaders well-suited for irregular warfare in the harsh environment of the Arabian deserts and require minimal resources for sustainment. They should perform well as intelligence gatherers and should be especially effective at raiding. The mobility, range and endurance of the Bedouin should also support their employment for deep operations, although the friction and uncertainty associated with use of Bedouin forces may place limitations on their value in this role. Security operations would take advantage of Bedouin knowledge of terrain, but are not well-suited to the Bedouin style of warfare and would abandon many if not most of the Bedouin advantages in mobility.

These conclusions indicate that Bedouin forces will be highly successful in irregular warfare in most cases, given appropriate circumstances and consideration of their limitations. The twentieth century has provided three excellent case studies in the employment of Bedouin irregulars, with which to test the validity of the conclusions. They are the campaigns of Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdul Rahman (popularly known as Ibn Sa'ud) to unify the Arabian Peninsula beginning in 1901; the campaigns of T. E. Lawrence in the Hejaz and Palestine from 1916 to 1918; and the British and Omani campaign to suppress the Dhofar Rebellion from 1971 to 1976.

IV. Bedouins and Irregular Warfare: Case Studies

A. Ibn Sa'ud and the Campaign for Unification of Saudi Arabia

Between 1901 and 1929, Ibn Sa'ud transformed a chaotic landscape of warring tribes into a single state, integrating groups which had been independent for centuries together under his personal banner as King of Al Mamluka Al 'arabiya Al Sa'udia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The principle implement for accomplishing this was the army of Bedouins that Ibn Sa'ud led out of the Najd.

Ibn Sa'ud was as much a product of Bedouin society and culture as the hardened warriors he commanded. He spent his childhood and early youth with the powerful Murrah tribe in the

Empty Quarter, in hiding from his family's enemies. He learned to track and survive in the harshest desert in the Peninsula, and was introduced to the Bedouin traditions of raiding as well.[40] His rise to prominence began in 1901, with a surprise raid which succeeded in recapturing his family's traditional headquarters and base of power, Riyadh, from their sworn enemies, the Rashiid clan. Ibn Sa'ud's most critical campaign for unification, however, occurred in 1904 in the area of Bukairiya (see map at Appendix 1). The details which follow are drawn predominately from Khair Al Diin Al Zarkalli's Shibhu Al Jazira fii 'ahid Al Malik Abdul Aziz, which contains one of the few detailed accounts of the campaign available in print.[41]

Ibn Rashid, the leader of the enemy camp, led the Shammar tribe in the northern Najd, while Ibn Sa'ud had put together a coalition of several powerful tribes in the central Najd. Seeing the need for additional forces, Ibn Rashid appealed to the Ottoman Empire, a traditional opponent of the Al Sa'ud's. In the summer of 1904, the Empire responded by dispatching eleven regular Turkish battalions to the Najd, accompanied by artillery, to support Ibn Rashid. It was this alliance that Ibn Sa'ud set out to defeat.

Concentrating his tribal forces at Bukairiya in the Northern Najd, Ibn Sa'ud first sought to defeat the Turks in open battle. He quickly learned that his Bedouin irregulars would not stand up to the disciplined Turkish infantry and field artillery in a conventional fight.[42] Ibn Sa'ud's forces were driven from the battlefield, and he suffered a great loss of prestige. Following

this defeat, Ibn Sa'ud initiated a campaign of raiding which was to last three months. Attacking Ibn Rashid's outposts, towns, wells and supply sources, and harassing the Turkish lines of communications, Ibn Sa'ud gradually wore his opponent down. The Turkish forces were not mobile enough to keep up with the Bedouin raiders, nor were they capable of sustaining themselves for extended periods in the desert. By shifting the campaign to one of raids, Ibn Sa'ud had largely neutralized the superiority of the Turkish regular battalions. As the raiding campaign began to sway the contest against Ibn Rashid, he was forced to move his forces out of the areas controlled by Ibn Sa'ud and closer to his own tribal area in the Shammar Mountains. Unfortunately for the Turks, this meant an extended march with Ibn Sa'ud in hot pursuit, a march for which they were neither equipped nor trained. The result was disaster: "the Turks were not used to desert warfare and they lacked mobility. They died in their hundreds from disease without the necessity for Ibn Sa'ud to fire a shot." [43] When Ibn Sa'ud again challenged Ibn Rashid in open battle, in October of 1904, what remained of the Turkish Army disintegrated, leaving Ibn Rashid's Shammar to be defeated by the superior forces of Ibn Sa'ud's tribal coalition. [44]

The Bukairiya campaign demonstrated both the weakness of Bedouins when employed in a conventional role, and their superiority when allowed to exploit their natural advantages as irregulars. The Bedouin warrior's mobility, self-reliance, ability to survive in the desert, and independence of

conventional lines of communication render him practically invulnerable, in his own element, to non-Bedouin forces. Ibn Sa'ud exploited this invulnerability to defeat one of the largest, most modern and best equipped armies ever seen in the Najd, and dealt a serious blow to the Ottoman Empire's position in the Arabian Peninsula.

B. T. E. Lawrence in the Hejaz and Palestine

T. E. Lawrence orchestrated one of the most notable irregular campaigns in modern history against the Turks in the Hejaz and Palestine (see maps at Appendix 2). His irregular forces effectively neutralized the Turkish Army in the Hejaz through a protracted campaign of raiding directed at Turkish communications. More significantly, in the latter stages of Allenby's campaign to seize Palestine, Lawrence led his irregulars into the operational depths of the Turkish rear and raided Deraa, a key rail center which constituted a decisive point in classic Jominian terms. Lawrence's success in isolating this rail center helped to unhinge the entire Turkish front in Palestine, leading to a decisive British victory. That Bedouin forces made up the significant portion of Lawrence's army is clear from his own account:

Our largest available resources were the tribesmen, men quite unused to formal warfare, whose assets were movement, endurance, individual intelligence, knowledge of the country, courage... The precious element of our forces were [these] Bedouin irregulars, and not the regulars whose role would only be to occupy the places to which the irregulars had already given access.[45]

The initial stages of the irregular campaign in the Hejaz were not auspicious, and pointed to the unsuitability of Bedouin forces for security operations. Given a terrain-oriented mission of securing an avenue of approach to Mecca in the face of Turkish conventional forces, the Bedouin irregulars were engaged and defeated by the Turks in short order. Lawrence concluded from this action that "irregular troops are as unable to defend a point or line as they are to attack it." [46] Having failed to stop the Turks in a conventional battle, Lawrence turned to raiding their exposed flank, and found the Bedouin to be ideal as raiders.

Camel raiding-parties, as self-contained as ships, could cruise without danger along any part of 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 or most profitable, with a sure retreat always behind them into an element which the Turks could not enter. [47]

The raiding effort was self-sustaining "by the extreme frugality of the desert men, and their high efficiency when mounted on their she-riding-camels." [48] The random nature of the raiding, its lack of specific geographic orientation and its avoidance of enemy strength was typical of traditional Bedouin tribal warfare. It enhanced the natural Bedouin mobility advantage and minimized the raiders' vulnerability to Turkish counterstrikes. [49]

The capabilities of the Bedouin irregulars also played a central role in the success of the operations in depth against Deraa. The ability of Bedouin war parties to obtain provisions and even additional fighting strength from local Bedouin tribes extended their range into the enemy's operational depths.

The process was to set up ladders of tribes, giving us a safe and comfortable route from our sea-bases (Yenbo, Wejh or Akaba) to our advanced bases of operation. These were sometimes three hundred miles away, a long distance in lands without railways or roads, but made short for us by...control by camel parties of the desolate and unmapped wilderness which fills up the center of Saudi Arabia.[50]

Once into the enemy's rear, the Bedouin knowledge of terrain, tracking skills, and their ability to gather information from local tribes provided the operational intelligence that is absolutely essential to successful deep operations. Lawrence provides a detailed account of the Deraa expedition in Seven Pillars of Wisdom. He makes it clear that without the extensive and accurate intelligence obtained by his Bedouin irregulars about the targets of the raid and the state of the Turkish defenses, the whole operation would have failed miserably.[51] Further, the lack of this sort of intelligence on the part of the Turks contributed to the success of Allenby's deception plan. This plan portrayed the irregulars as part of a British main effort on the Turkish left flank, and also used the Bedouin to create the fiction of a conventional attack in the same area. The actual main attack was on the Turkish right, near the coast, and it succeeded at least partly because of Turkish redeployments to meet the fictional attack on their left.[52]

As noted previously, not all characteristics of Bedouin society support their employment as irregulars. Lawrence found that "Any of the Arabs could go home whenever the conviction failed him," and many did.[53] Lawrence was constrained to pursue a continuous recruiting effort among the sheikhs and

influential elders of the local tribes wherever he was operating and throughout his campaigns. He also encountered the problem of tribal politics, noting that "it was impossible to mix or combine tribes, since they disliked or distrusted one another. Likewise we could not use the men of one tribe in the territory of another." [54] This required Lawrence to rebuild almost completely his forces when transferring his operations to another theater, as he did when he shifted his main effort from the Hejaz to Palestine. Despite these problems, the successes enjoyed by Lawrence in both the Hejaz and Palestine can be traced, for the most part, to the suitability of his Bedouin forces to irregular warfare. It is unlikely that a non-Bedouin force could have produced the same results without a much greater investment of resources and time.

C. The Dhofar Rebellion

The highlands, or "jebel" area of the Dhofar Province in Oman is, like the sand desert of the Empty Quarter, one of the most remote and inhospitable areas of the Arabian Peninsula (see map at Appendix 3). The base since 1963 of an insurgency against the Omani central government, by 1971 the jebel was virtually an independent state under the control of the rebels. At that point, and at the instigation of the new Sultan, the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) initiated a series of campaigns which resulted by 1976 in the complete suppression of the rebellion and the restoration of government authority throughout the province. An

essential element in the success of these campaigns was the irregular force, known as the firgats, which the British Special Air Service (SAS) recruited from among the local Bedouin tribes.

According to Colonel Tony Jeapes, the commander of the SAS Squadron, the firgats were initially recruited to deal with the problem of "jebelitis" among the SAF conventional forces. "Jebelitis" was the fear of the rebel-controlled jebel, and the conviction that the area was impossible to fight or operate in. "Time and again the SAS were told that movement on the jebel during the monsoon was impossible. Even the cleated soles of British Army boots could find no grip. It was impossible to stand up...let alone walk." [55] The irregulars, raised in the jebel and intimately familiar with the terrain, were able to match the mobility of the rebel forces. Accustomed to subsisting in the highlands for extended periods, the firgats established a permanent presence in the area, a task that had been beyond the capabilities of the conventional SAF. The firgats also developed an intelligence network based on tribal affiliation and on the Bedouin informal information system described by Thesiger and Musil. [56] The intelligence provided by this network filled a vacuum that had consistently frustrated SAF operations. The firgats' excellent intelligence network combined with their mobility also made them highly effective in patrolling on the jebel. According to Colonel Jeapes,

The SAF were best at seizing a piece of ground and securing it to provide a firm base from which the firgat patrols, supported by the SAS when necessary, could operate, and into which they could retire in safety... [The firgats] did not like static warfare or

straight infantry work. They were at their best on patrol when they could take advantage of the natural lie of the land and use it to outmaneuver the enemy.[57]

There is an aspect of the conflict in the Dhofar which distinguishes it from the previous two case studies. During the latter stages of the conflict, the firqats were successfully employed in security operations, providing what amounted to fixed garrisons in the jebel. These garrisons protected the local population from the rebels, and assisted in consolidating government influence among the local tribes. This would seem to contradict Lawrence's and Ibn Sa'ud's experiences with Bedouin forces in static or positional warfare; to some extent it also seems to contradict Jeapes' observations quoted above from the earlier stages of the conflict. The key factors in the success of these security operations appear to have been restricting the duties of the firqats to their own tribal areas; providing extensive initial support from conventional SAF forces to enable the firqats to defend their positions from the rebels; and augmenting their efforts with a well-financed and comprehensive civic action program aimed at improving the standard of living among their respective tribes.[58]

The success of the firqats in breaking the hold of the rebels on the jebel offers one of the best examples of Bedouin suitability for irregular operations. It was this suitability-- in the form of superior mobility, better intelligence, and greater ability to survive and function in the harsh highlands environment-- that gave the rebels their initial measure of

superiority over the SAF. It is unlikely that a non-Bedouin force, be it conventional or unconventional, could have overcome the rebels' advantages on their home ground as the firqats did so effectively.

All three of the preceding case studies verify the conclusion that the characteristics of Bedouin society facilitate the recruitment and employment of Bedouin forces for irregular warfare. Bedouin irregulars have proven to be extremely effective at collecting intelligence and raiding, providing capabilities not available to non-Bedouin forces. Within the limitations imposed by Bedouin society, and in the appropriate circumstances, they can also conduct deep operations in support of a conventional campaign. The firqats' success at security operations in Oman indicates that Bedouin forces may be effective in this role as well, if measures are taken to overcome their inherent vulnerabilities when a terrain- or area-oriented mission.

V. Irregular Forces on the Modern Battlefield:

Force Multiplier or Anachronism?

Post-World War Two conflicts have witnessed a proliferation of modern weapons including tanks, advanced combat aircraft, artillery and even surface-to-surface missiles, beyond the industrialized nations to much of the third world. The advent of mid-intensity warfare in what has traditionally been a low-intensity arena of conflict raises legitimate questions about the

utility of lightly armed irregular forces with little or no conventional training. The advances in airpower in particular, which have exacerbated a traditional irregular vulnerability to air attack, challenge the survivability of Bedouin irregulars in a theater likely to include extensive air activity on both sides.[59] The questions raised by these developments have been answered in part by recent experiences in Afghanistan and Chad which indicate that irregular forces continue to be both survivable and effective, even in the face of modern heavy conventional forces and high-technology weapons systems.

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan with one of the largest, most modern mechanized armies the region has ever seen. They quickly discovered that their heavy armored forces were completely ineffective against the mobile, lightly armed Mujahideen guerrillas.[60] Resorting in 1981-82 to a mix of special operations, western style counter-insurgency tactics, and massive air campaigns, the Soviets enjoyed greater success. The guerrillas managed to survive, however, and Soviet air losses escalated as the Mujahideen acquired simple air defense weapons and a few SA-7 Grails.[61] A watershed was reached in 1987, with the decision of the Reagan administration to provide advanced Stinger missiles to the guerrillas. The Stingers clearly swung the balance in the air against the Soviets and the Afghan government. In fighting around Jaji, the Soviets lost six aircraft in a single week to the sophisticated but easy to use missiles. Deprived of their air cover and reconnaissance, the Soviet conventional forces were limited to operations in the

lowlands, leaving the Mujahideen virtually invulnerable in their mountain strongholds.[62]

In Chad, the war with Libya over the disputed Aozou Strip offers a paradigm for Soviet client-state aggression in the third world. Libya invaded Chad in the first half of 1987 with a large Soviet-equipped and trained army, using Soviet-style conventional tactics based on armored and mechanized formations, and supported by large concentrations of artillery. In opposition the Chadians fielded lightly armed, highly mobile guerrilla forces. To the surprise of many military observers, the Chadian irregulars scored repeated successes against the better-armed and more numerous Libyan forces.[63] Like the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Libyans resorted to a large-scale air campaign to regain the initiative, with lavish employment of high-performance jet aircraft and attack helicopters. The Libyans enjoyed some success with this campaign, recapturing the village of Aozou from the Chadians on August 28, 1987.[64] The response of Chad's Western supporters was not long in coming: in October of the same year, a U.S. Government spokesman confirmed that the Pentagon was providing Stinger missiles to the Chadian forces.[65] Unwilling to expose his dearly-bought air forces to the kind of heavy losses which the Soviets were already beginning to experience in Afghanistan, Colonel Qaddafi was forced to abandon his designs on Chadian territory, at least temporarily.

The preceding examples illustrate the continuing effectiveness of irregular warfare. Even with the benefits of modern armor and mechanization, conventional forces today suffer

from many of the same disadvantages that their non-mechanized predecessors faced. Technology also appears to be a two-edged sword: it can benefit the irregulars (e.g., Stinger missiles, RPG 7 antitank weapons, and modern light mortars, to name just a few) just as easily as it can the conventional forces. Provided that the irregular forces have access to the appropriate military technology, they can play a significant role in either an insurgency or a more conventional mid-intensity conflict. Given this irregular capability, the Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula represent a critical resource that USCENTCOM cannot afford to ignore.

The current force structure shortfalls and resource constraints mentioned in the Introduction[66] necessitate the acceptance of a very high degree of risk by USCENTCOM during the initial stages of a Southwest Asian or Arabian Gulf contingency. To the extent that USCENTCOM is required to depend upon extensive basing in the Peninsula for sustainment and air, while deploying most of its combat forces to the Asian mainland, this risk will probably persist throughout the period of operations, and could even escalate as the theater matures. Given the Soviet propensity for special operations aimed at the enemy's rear, and the presence of a Soviet client state in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, U.S. planners cannot afford to disregard the vulnerability of projected bases on the Arabian Peninsula. The Bedouin tribes of the Peninsula represent a significant potential resource for USCENTCOM in reducing the level of risk in this vital area.

Irregular forces recruited from among local Bedouin tribes can assist USCENTCOM in collecting vital intelligence, in conducting rear operations, and in meeting the challenge of low intensity conflict in the Arabian Peninsula. A Bedouin intelligence network can provide warning of rear area threats in sufficient time to permit an effective response; it can also provide critical operational and tactical intelligence with respect to insurgencies and low- to mid-intensity conventional threats from Soviet clients in the area.

The British and Omani success in employing Bedouin irregulars in security operations in the Dhofar might be duplicated in some parts of the USCENTCOM AOR, if appropriate augmentation was provided to the Bedouin forces. Providing security with Bedouin irregulars around bases and lines of communications located in tribal areas could release significant U.S. and host nation conventional forces for other missions.

The demonstrated Bedouin proficiency at raiding can be utilized by Bedouin irregulars to pursue and destroy enemy forces constituting level one and possibly level two threats in USCENTCOM rear areas. In the event that conflict in the Arabian Peninsula exceeds this level, Bedouin irregulars recruited on a larger scale can execute raiding campaigns similar to those conducted by the forces under Lawrence and Ibn Sa'ud. Such campaigns can act as a significant force multiplier when integrated with the conventional effort. Where the raiding lines of operation traverse terrain impassable to or very difficult for

conventional forces, Bedouin raiders may be able to exploit their mobility advantages to penetrate into the operational depths of the enemy rear, as they did under Lawrence in Palestine.

VI. Conclusion

The characteristics of Bedouin society facilitate the employment of Bedouin irregular forces in a variety of roles, across the spectrum of conflict. The campaigns of Ibn Sa'ud in the Najd, Lawrence in the Hejaz and Palestine, and of the British and Omanis in the Dhofar demonstrate the effectiveness of Bedouin irregulars, when employed properly and in the appropriate circumstances.

Recruitment of irregulars from among the Arabian Peninsula's Bedouin tribes would tap a potential resource which can make a critical difference to the success of USCENTCOM, should it be required to execute one of its contingency plans. While these conclusions are valid for areas in the Arabian Gulf and Southwest Asia which have a significant Bedouin population, areas with similar societies and cultures should support similar conclusions.

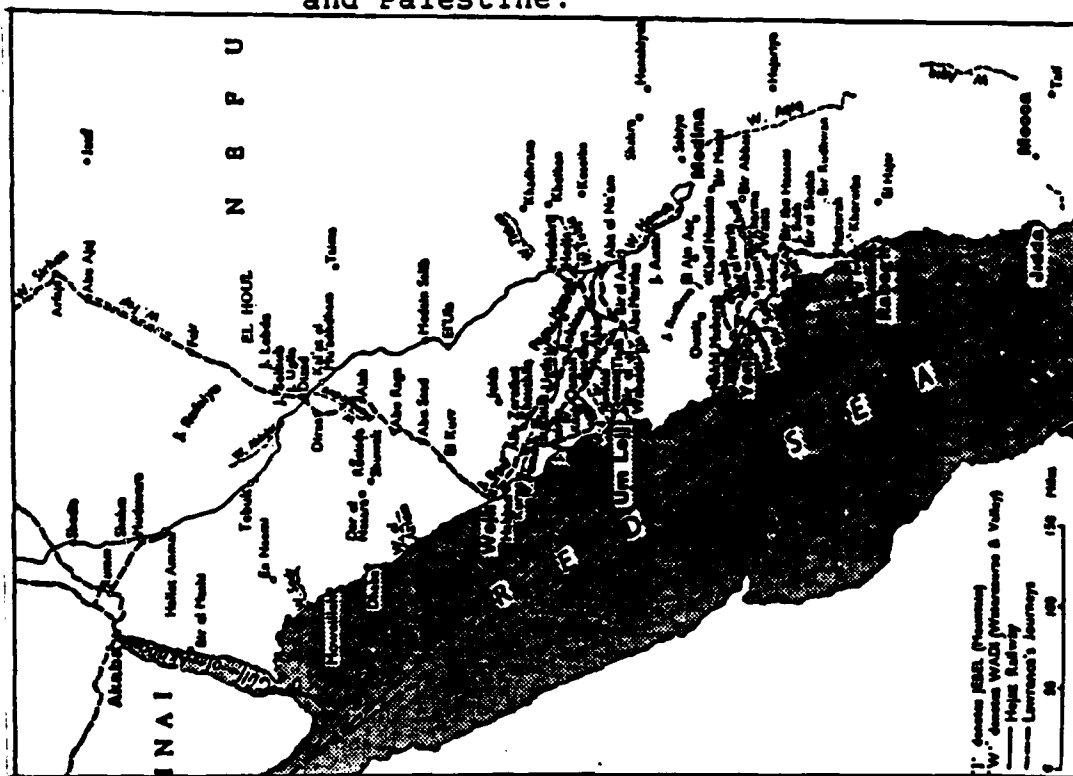
Current U.S. Army doctrine says little about the recruitment or employment of irregular forces. If we are to realize the full benefit of this potential resource, a doctrinal base must be developed which addresses the place of irregular forces in the AirLand Battle. Responsibility for command and control of irregular operations, their relationship to combined operations,

and concepts for integrating irregular and conventional campaigns are all issues which must be addressed. U.S. assets which can be utilized to recruit, equip and direct irregular forces must be identified. While U.S. Special Forces are to some extent appropriate for this mission, they are already heavily committed in most USCENTCOM contingencies and may not be available to support an irregular campaign of the type envisioned here. A more suitable organization, at least in the initial stages of irregular recruitment and organization, may be the U.S. Army's Psychological Operations Battalions. In any case, the potential contribution of Bedouin irregular forces to U.S. operations merits careful attention from those organizations having responsibility for the Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia.

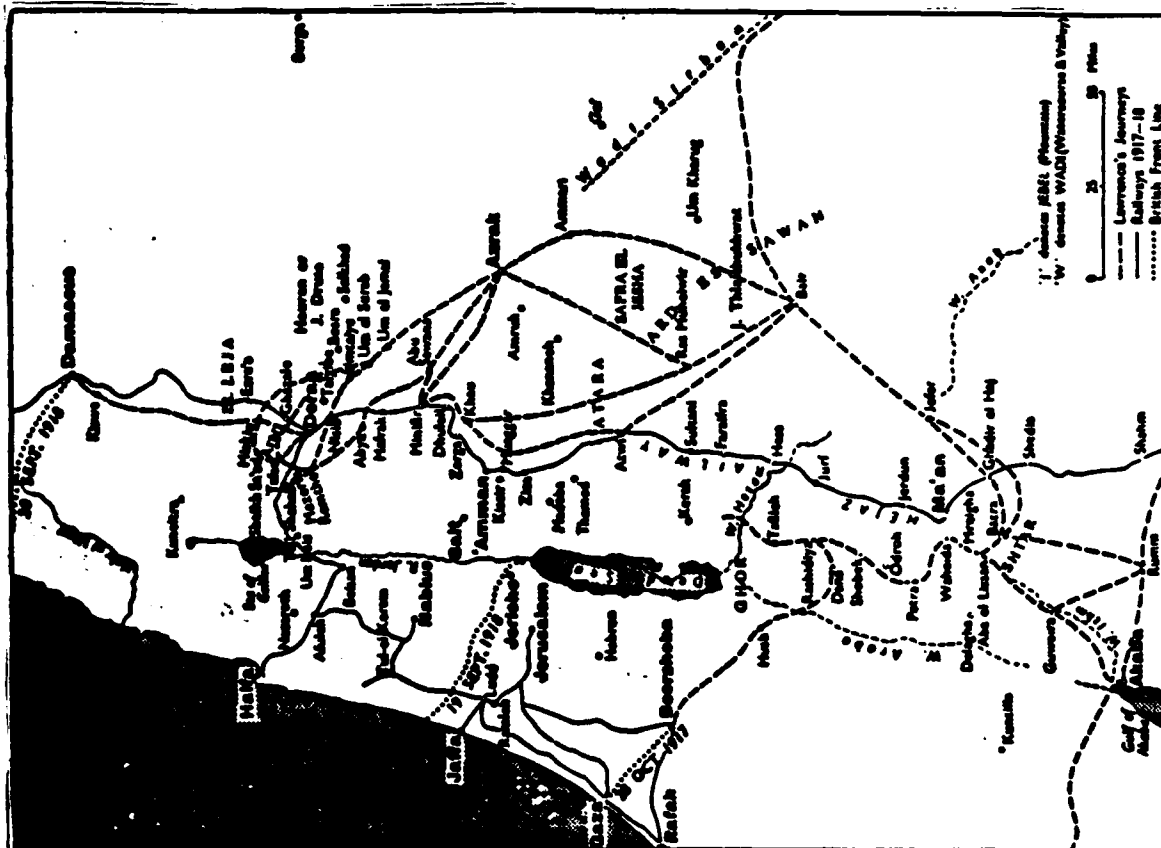
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Appendix 2. Maps of Lawrence's Campaigns in the Hejaz and Palestine.

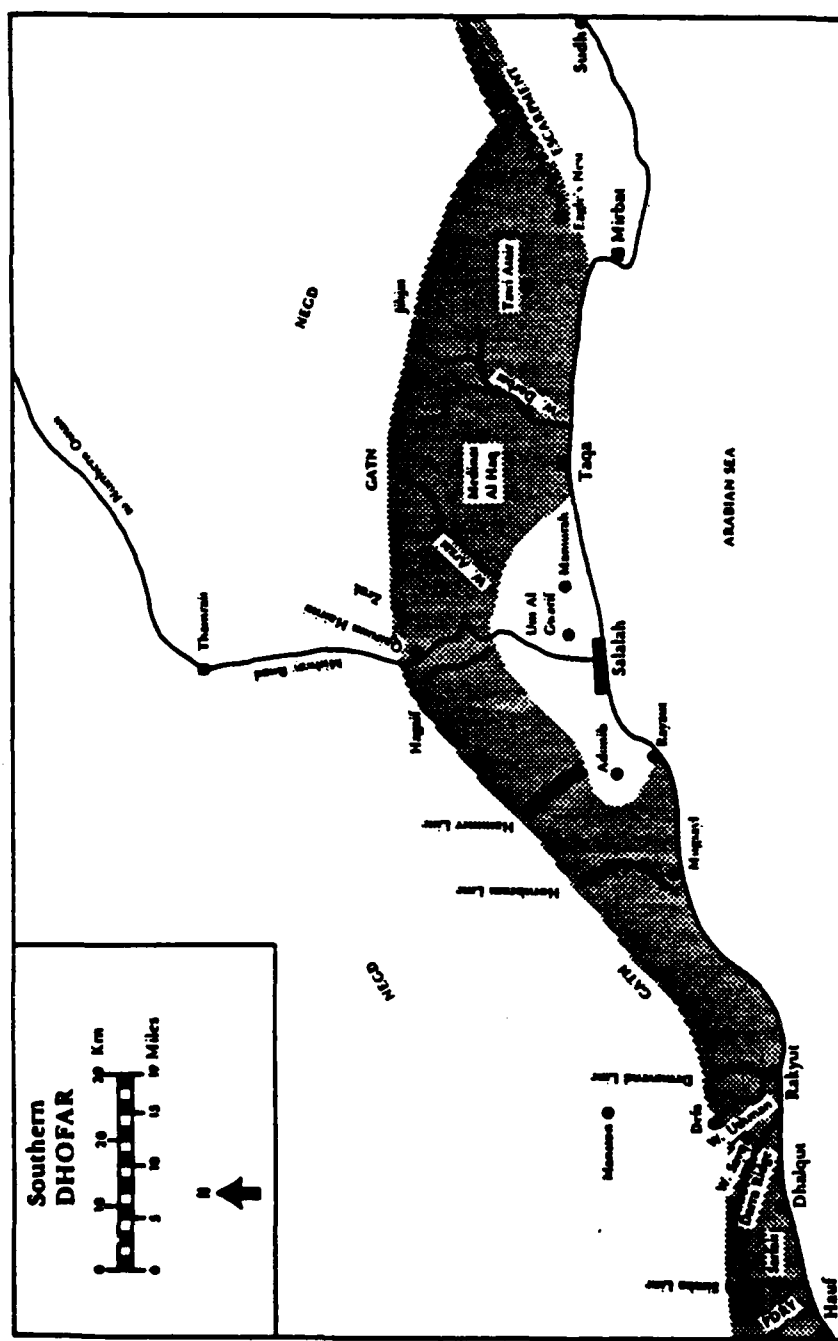


Raiding the Hejaz Railway, 1917.



Deep Strikes in Palestine, 1918.
From Seven Pillars of Wisdom, T. E. Lawrence.

Appendix 3. Map of the Dhofar Province.



From SAS: Operation Oman, Colonel Tony Jeapes.

ENDNOTES

Introductory note. My own observations are based upon two years spent in Saudi Arabia, 1985 and 1986, working with all levels of Saudi government and society as Director of Mission Relations for the U.S. Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia. Most of the Bedouin whom I encountered in Saudi Arabia displayed the traditional values and characteristics which form the basis of this study.

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20. Musil, pp. 71, 471.
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23. Ibid., p. 524.
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26. Thesiger, Arabian Sands, p. 106, 117.
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30. Ibid., pp. 116-117.
31. Ibid., pp. 294-297.
32. Ibid., pp. 80-81.
33. Ibid., pp. 262-263.
34. Supra, p. 15.
35. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
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