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**SEARCHING FOR VICTORY IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES:
T.E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt, 1916-1918**

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"Culture, comprised of all that is vague and intangible, is not generally integrated into strategic planning except at the most superficial level" ¹

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Culture is a difficult concept to grasp, thus, it has been the strategic stepchild of military planners and combat leaders for centuries. Nonetheless, "the collective values, beliefs, and experiences which predispose (but not predetermine) perception and behavior of a group," which we know as culture, have dominated the way nations and other groups conduct warfare ². Fundamental to national and group identities, culture has often separated the protagonists when no other factor would generate support for war.

Surprisingly, though, military leaders have often ignored it as a planning consideration. Part of the reason for this omission is the difficulty of describing the issue and addressing it accordingly. "Let a strategist announce publicly that he is basing his strategy on some cultural aspect of his opponent's behavior," one writer recently stated, "and watch how quickly that behavior changes" ³. There *is* a cultural paradigm at work among nations and groups in conflict -- the problem is "How does the strategist adequately incorporate it into the planning process?"

Without question, the omission of cultural considerations in strategy has usually led to defeat for the omitting party. British leaders failed to recognize the emerging culture of the American colonists in the late 1700's, and they completely underestimated the resolve of the revolutionaries. As a result, the British leadership embarked on what they believed was a brief punitive expedition, only to find themselves in a costly, protracted war they could not sustain.

Having developed a strategy which completely ignored the emerging cultural divergence and deep seated grievances the colonists felt, all the king's men could not put the North American empire back together, and the survival of the United States as an independent nation was won

Another superb example of omitting cultural factors in strategic planning which led to defeat occurred in Japan on the eve of World War II. Japanese planning for the infamous surprise attack on Pearl Harbor neglected the fact that Americans would likely harbor strong animosities against them for the almost preemptive attack (the Japanese planned to deliver their declaration of war minutes prior to the strike on Pearl Harbor), and that resentment would strengthen American resolve. In fact, they were surprised by the failure of the U S to surrender soon after the attack, and Japanese leaders only gradually became aware of the intense determination of the American people to sustain the war effort. Had the Japanese understood the cultural paradigm in effect in the United States, it is quite probable they would not have become involved in a long , risky war where their inherent resource deficiencies offered little chance of victory. Even though the Japanese military had some key leaders who had been educated in the United States, the hierarchy either ignored them or the American exposure did not make the impact it should have. In any case, the cultural element was omitted from the Japanese strategy. Total defeat was the result.

The American track record in considering culture in strategy is equally undistinguished. The Vietnam War defeat, for example, is all the more remarkable, not only because the American military failed to incorporate the Vietnamese culture into their planning, but also because the French had suffered defeat against the *same* enemy less than two decades before -- in no small measure because their strategists ignored the Vietnamese "collective values, beliefs, and experiences."

Having a graphic example of what not to ignore, the Americans did exactly what they should not have done. The bitterness of defeat still lives in this country.

Today, the same deficiency exists in the strategic methodology taught and employed by military thinkers in the United States. The National War College, preeminent institution of strategic education in this country, uses the Joint Chiefs of Staff framework for strategic planning (as espoused in Joint Publication 3.0) and frequently a corollary document known as the “Deibel Model” (see Annex A).⁴ In both documents, culture is not specifically addressed as a planning factor. Nor does culture receive institutional consideration in any other models in use at the National War College.

Instead, the framework we use orients on familiar parameters, rather than address those that culture might introduce -- such as the influence of non-state actors, media role in strategy, religious and ethnic centers of gravity, and other transnational factors.⁵ Strangely enough, though, the stated goal of the U.S. strategic educational process is to foster innovation. “Frameworks are not dogma,” John W. Taylor wrote in an unpublished article at the National War College, “or the ‘school solution’, or the only way to think about a problem.”⁶

This is not to say there are no military leaders or institutions who have ever paid attention to the importance of the cultural paradigm in strategy. The modern examples of those who did, though, are far fewer than those who did not. Of the examples of military leaders who successfully recognized the importance of culture in strategy and made good use of that knowledge, none is more striking than Colonel T. E. Lawrence. His campaigns with the Arabs against the Turks during the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 are a remarkable study in the effective use of cultural resources to execute a victorious strategy. This paper examines Lawrence’s effective

use of culture in strategic planning on the operational level during the Arab Revolt, and suggests that there is significant value in similar approaches for strategic planners and military leaders, both today and tomorrow. By institutionalizing cultural considerations into our framework for military strategy, Lawrence's experiences indicate we can gain a significant advantage on the diverse battlefields of modern war.

PART II: "THE COMICAL LITTLE BASTARD"

A unique man in many respects, Thomas Edward Lawrence seemed an unlikely candidate for becoming a "military legend", yet, he became one of the most famous military leaders of the 20th Century. He was thoroughly British, raised in comfortable middle class surroundings, and from his early youth he developed a keen appreciation for exploration and study. Diminutive and slight in build, "Ned" (as he was known by his parents and three brothers) was nonetheless active from his boyhood, constantly investigating the English countryside and later, France as well. Much of his time was spent alone, though, as he never developed the love of sports and socializing that characterized the lives of most of his contemporaries.

As he grew to manhood, Lawrence began to show signs of being more unique in comparison to his peers than simply choosing a shy life of relative solitude. His vacations with boyhood friends in France led him to explore much of that country by bicycle, and soon he yearned for more far reaching adventures. Inquisitive and restless, Lawrence began to look for opportunities to explore the world beyond Europe. One of his principal biographers attributes this cosmopolitan bent to becoming a key factor in Lawrence being quite different from other

British who ventured abroad “ [He] never felt the apprehension about living in foreign countries that was so common among the British In the late Victorian era the British were generally insular, class-conscious and nationalist ”⁸ This openness toward other people and their cultures would prove instrumental in Lawrence’s adaptive posture toward the Arabs with which he would come to be identified during the First World War

As a student at Oxford, Lawrence was exposed to people and opportunities that would take him to the Middle East, and he would go there with the foundation of a true appreciation for the Arabs and their culture Having the good fortune to have met one of Britain’s most prominent archaeologists, D G Hogarth, in 1909, he finalized his plans to visit the Holy Land The impetus for the journey seems to have been the combination of bicycling throughout France and developing a keen interest in the military aspects of the Crusades Meeting Hogarth merely fueled the fires of adventure burning in the young college student Hogarth tried to impress upon Lawrence the difficulty and hardships facing an Englishman traveling in the Middle East In contrast, Lawrence grew more determined to go, despite facing a lack of funds which might be used to temper some of the privations awaiting an inexperienced visitor Another distinguished Arabian traveler wrote to Lawrence after the Oxford student had written him for advice, “It is a land of squalor [The] populations only know their own wretched life, and look upon any European wandering in their country with at best a veiled ill-will ”⁹ Now seemingly inspired by the dire warnings of more mature and experienced men, Lawrence immersed himself in preparations for the trip He studied the geography and history of the region extensively, read the accounts of other travelers, and studied Arabic assiduously By June of 1909 Lawrence was on his way to Beirut, where he would spend the summer doing what few modern Europeans had ever

attempted -- *walking* 600 miles across the Holy Land -- to study the Crusader Castles. Along the way, he had ample opportunity to learn the Arab culture on an intimate level. That education would prove invaluable in the years ahead.

Early adventures such as the 1909 trip gave Lawrence a unique perspective on the Arab culture. This in-depth understanding and experience the young Englishman was gaining, though, was not without risk. The danger of ostracism in "going native" was very real for the British of the Kitchener era who visited or lived abroad. Englishmen were expected to be colonial toward the rest of the world, superior in manner and, perhaps, kind on occasion. The only true culture was British. Lawrence rejected the closed mindedness of his fellow British subjects, though, opting instead for an attitude far more enlightened and progressive. He ultimately became one of those few Englishmen who, as he himself wrote, "feel deeply the influence of the native people, and try to adjust themselves to its atmosphere and spirit. They imitate the native as far as possible, and so avoid friction in their daily life. They are like the people but not of the people."¹⁰

Lawrence's opportunity to be "like the people but not of the people" came about as a result of the Great War, when all of Europe became caught up in what emerged as a world wide conflict. Lawrence had spent a considerable amount of time in the Middle East by 1914, was already fluent in Arabic, and his archaeological and map making experience were extensive. After his initial adventure in 1909, Lawrence had become close friends with Hogarth, and had accompanied the famous archaeologist on several subsequent expeditions. His knowledge of geography and trafficability had already reached influential levels in the British government, so when Lawrence wanted to join the Army and do his part in the "war to end all wars," he was immediately accepted and sent to Cairo as an intelligence officer. He would prove to be one of

the most unusual intelligence officers ever to serve in the British Army

PART III: THE EMERGENCE OF THE CULTURAL STRATEGIST

The intelligence team Lieutenant Lawrence joined in Cairo at the end of 1914 was both young and talented, and these traits served them well in a time of great uncertainty for British and Allied fortunes. The Turks, having entered the war on the side of the Axis powers, owned an empire that stretched across the length and breadth of the Middle East and beyond. The Cairo intelligence office was saddled with the daunting task of figuring out how to best to attack this vast Turkish empire with few resources-- since it was already apparent that all available men would be needed on the Western Front. Thus Lawrence and his youthful colleagues had to analyze the diverse aspects of the Middle East from an unusual strategic standpoint, and explore what options might be feasible.

Over the next two years, the Cairo office labored long and hard to devise a strategy to exploit the Turkish vulnerabilities. Although the Middle East was a secondary theater, it was clear that any success against the Turks which kept large numbers of their troops tied up weakened the Axis effort elsewhere. Since British forces were scarce, it seemed prudent to look for other sources of manpower. The first opportunity appeared in fomenting unrest among the indigenous Arab populations. That effort met with some success, particularly in the person of Sherif Hussein, Emir of Mecca. Hussein was spoiling for a kingdom, and with his three sons Ali, Abdullah, and Feisal, they could count on thousands of Bedouins to rally to their call to arms. But there were others in the Cairo office who did not share the intelligence section's interest in

fostering ties with the Arabs, at least in part because they were blinded by parochial Victorian attitudes. Lawrence was particularly disappointed by these men, for their approach offered little to the Arabs as incentives to rise up against the Turks. "The English were not especially concerned," one historian wrote, "with setting up a new Arab state (as a logical consequence of the Arab revolt, which some British had been actively encouraging). They doubted the capacity of the Arabs for any form of civilized government, or even for concerted military action."¹¹

Nonetheless, there simply weren't enough Englishmen to defeat the Turks, and after the Gallipoli debacle in 1915, the situation worsened. Rather than exploit the obvious cultural differences that existed between the Arabs and the Turks by putting the bulk of their efforts toward fostering an Arab revolt, the British leadership sent a large force of Indian regulars to advance up the Mesopotamian river delta toward Baghdad, looking for a decisive battle. With Lawrence observing, the offensive became stalemate and then defeat, as nearly 12,000 British and Indians surrendered to the encircling Turks at Kut in May, 1916. "For his part," biographer Jeremy Wilson wrote, "Lawrence observed and was shocked by the attitude of the Indian Army officers toward their native Indian troops as well as the indigenous Arabs of Iraq. The visit to Mesopotamia left him with a strong distaste for the Anglo-Indian style of administration."¹²

While the British were trying in vain to use their colonial Indian troops as a counter to growing Turkish strength in the region, Hussein launched his revolt in June. He and his sons led makeshift Arab armies of disgruntled Turkish veterans and Bedouin tribesmen to surprising victories at Mecca and the outskirts of Medina. Soon after the initial Arab successes, Hussein approached the British headquarters in Jidda, looking for recognition and support. The Arab leader reminded British officials that the Arabs had not gone along with Turkish calls for a jihad

(holy war) against the Allies earlier in the war, when British forces were particularly vulnerable to the advancing Turks. Impressed by the initial success of Hussein's forces, British leaders were anxious to buy time to regroup after Kut, and this revolt looked promising. They decided to support the Arabs, even agreeing to vague acceptance of Hussein's claim to the Arabian peninsula, the Hejaz, and parts of Syria and Mesopotamia.

The British soon found their optimism for the Arabs to be premature. The revolt had sputtered after initial successes, and the Turks were regrouping, now threatening Rabegh, a key Arab supply port. Diplomat Ronald Storrs went to visit Jedda and discuss matters with Abdullah, accompanied by a brash young intelligence officer, T. E. Lawrence. Subsequently, Lawrence visited Hussein's other two sons at their command posts, assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, the report Lawrence sent back resulted in his being posted as liaison officer to Feisal, the only Arab leader Lawrence felt to be capable of succeeding against the resurgent Turks.

Lawrence's appearance in Feisal's camp was not exactly a deliberate strategic move by the British leadership. In fact, it was more of coincidence than concerted effort that Lawrence found himself with the opportunity of a lifetime. His exasperation with spending two years in Cairo was directed not at his energetic contemporaries, but rather at what he labeled somewhat pointedly, "sixty-four generals doing nothing."¹³ Finally, he had asked permission to observe the Arab forces in the field, and as one historian later wrote, "the joy at his departure from Cairo was widespread."¹⁴

When on a December day in 1916 the slight figure of Lieutenant Lawrence rode his camel into the Wadi Safra camp of Feisal, a drama began: the young officer was uniquely suited to play a

starring role in Thoroughly acclimated to the region and its people, he could speak the language, he knew its history, and he was not burdened by the stuffy British arrogance that had crippled so many others. H. A. De Weerd captured the moment best in the following account of this unusual meeting:

It was a striking event. At the end of his camel ride from Jedda to Wadi Safra, Lawrence sat in Feisal's tent surrounded by bronzed Arab warriors and chiefs. After Feisal had made the customary remarks of greeting to the uninvited British second lieutenant, he asked casually "And how do you like our place here in the Wadi Safra?" With perfect urbanity, but with challenging inflection, Lawrence replied "*Well, but it is far from Damascus*." There was a sharp intake of breath by the listening chiefs. It was as if a naked sword had been flung flashing above their heads. But in its descent Feisal caught it deftly by the handle, saying with equal urbanity "*Praise God, but there are Turks nearer than that*." This brave reply satisfied Lawrence that he had found the true leader of the Arab war, and the sharp challenge of Lawrence fastened the vision of the Arabs on the jeweled towers and minarets of their ancient capital.¹⁵

For the next few months, Lawrence worked quietly in the background to gain Feisal's trust, for he knew the other chiefs would follow Feisal's lead. He saw his liaison role as far broader than merely being a purveyor of information back and forth between the Arab camp and the British headquarters. Rather, he saw himself as the leader of the Arab forces through Feisal. Lawrence had agreed to wear Bedouin clothing from the outset, and he lived as the Arabs did. He could ride, hunt, shoot, and endure privations as well as any Bedouin. More importantly, though, Lawrence could, and did, maintain his British officership in the midst of "going native." He skillfully analyzed the strategic situation the Arabs faced in early 1917, and began to formulate a plan of his own. He worked carefully to lead Feisal to the same conclusion, so the strategy would seem to be the Arab leaders' concept. Feisal and his Arab chiefs gradually saw Lawrence as more than an oddity -- he was a tough, curious Englishman who respected the Arabs for what

they were That respect for the Arabs and their way of doing things was instrumental in Lawrence becoming an accepted member of Feisal's staff

Essentially, Lawrence saw the light, mobile Arabs as a harassment and interdiction force, which could seize limited objectives and disrupt lines of communication Key to success, then, was for the insurgents to occupy the major ports along the Arabian coast for supplies to be brought in, subsequently moving north and east from the ports into the Arabian desert to strike at the Turkish lifeline -- the Hejaz railway Strong enemy garrisons located at cities inland, such as Medina, would be left isolated (See Map 1)

Meanwhile, the Turks were threatening to end the Arab uprising in early 1917 by crushing the rebellious Bedouins as they fought to preserve their supply bases at Rabegh and Yenbo Having been resupplied in the Fall of 1916, Turkish forces had sallied from Medina in strength toward the Arab held ports, easily brushing aside Feisal's poorly coordinated resistance Without the artillery and machine guns needed for a firm stance against the advancing Turks, the outnumbered and outgunned Arabs looked to have little chance of surviving

First priority, then, in Lawrence's mind was to relieve the mounting pressure on Rabegh and Yenbo In convincing Feisal to go along with this daring scheme, Lawrence shared a dark fear with his Arab ally "Our fear was not of what lay before us," he later wrote, "but of what lay behind"¹⁶ Lawrence was convinced the 200 mile march north to capture Wegh would relieve the pressure on the Arab supply bases, but to muster the necessary forces Feisal would have to strip the Rabegh and Yenbo defenses bare Feisal's trust in Lawrence carried the day, though, and the Arabs set out for Wegh in January, 1917 The battle which led to Wegh's capture immediately threatened the Hejaz railway, causing the Turks to back away from Rabegh and withdraw into

Medina Feisal's support of Lawrence's plan proved to be a pivotal decision in the course of the Arab Revolt, from now on, the Arabs would be able to strike the railway lines with relative impunity while the Turks remained on the operational defensive

This strategy of attacking the supply lines, and not the Turkish Army, was a distinct departure from the earlier Arab plan, whereby they were trying to defeat the Turks through a series of disjointed attacks on strongholds such as Medina But realizing the importance of saving Rabegh and Yenbo, Lawrence carefully considered what the Arabs were really capable of doing Not yet candidates to become regular fighting troops, the Bedouin tribesmen appeared to be "rather casual, distrustful fellows, but very active and cheerful"¹⁷ Moreover, they were hardy and fit, able to ride many miles in a day and survive the intense heat and lack of water far better than other, more regular forces could "In the emergency it occurred to me," Lawrence wrote, "that perhaps the virtue of irregulars lay in depth, not in face"¹⁸ The solution, then, would be to use the Arabs as raiders, constantly threatening the Turkish supply lines That operational strategy would exhaust the Turkish forces while preserving the Arabs And, the strategy matched the cultural strength of the Arabs (mobility) against the weakness of the Turks (dependence on a fixed line of communication)

By the summer of 1917, with the tacit support from British headquarters in Cairo, Lawrence and the Arabs made a grueling 600 mile march across the desert to attack the port of Aqaba from the rear Working with the British navy, the Arabs seized the port, inflicting 1200 casualties on the Turks while suffering only two It was another turning point in the Arab campaign "When the (British) staff at Cairo compared this operation to the second battle of Gaza," one writer later noted, "in which General Sir Archibald Murray contrived to kill 1,700

Turks at the cost of 3,000 British casualties, their estimation of the value of the Arab revolt underwent a rapid change”¹⁹

What followed was a series of Arab and British victories which kept the Turks on the operational and strategic defensive for the remainder of the war. In August of 1917, General Sir Edmund Allenby replaced Murray as the British commander in the Middle East, and the new commander developed both a professional admiration for and personal friendship with the odd Englishman who had turned the Arabs into a formidable fighting force. Supplying the Arabs with light machine guns, demolitions, and mortars, Allenby used them as a superb compliment to the British forces. Feisal’s troops destroyed so much railway the Turks had to employ thousands of troops scattered along over 1000 miles of Hejaz railway and accompanying desert, an effort which proved exhaustive and futile. Meanwhile, the British regular forces struck at key cities such as Jerusalem, which Allenby occupied in December, 1917. Allenby then gave the Arabs a special staff, the Hejaz Operations Staff, to coordinate British support.

As the war progressed, Lawrence used both gold and vague promises of independence to maintain Arab focus on sustaining the revolt.²⁰ But the reality was it took more than money or promises to insure Arab loyalty over the long months and hardships of campaigning. Lawrence later gave some insights on the leadership challenge of keeping the Bedouins motivated to attack isolated rail lines and an occasional supply column. “We had to arrange their (the Arabs) minds in order of battle, just as carefully and as formally as other officers arranged their bodies. we seldom had to concern ourselves with what our men did, but much with what they thought.”²¹

More importantly, Lawrence had superbly integrated the Arab cultural strengths with his observation of Turkish vulnerabilities to develop a sophisticated strategy which complimented the

British efforts in Palestine His willingness to immerse himself in Arab culture gave him insights no one else had "It was possible for Lawrence to understand at the first instance," one analyst later wrote, "the Arabs better than any Briton who worked for the Arab cause"²² He had established a firm relationship of trust with Feisal and his chieftains, observed the Turks carefully, and he decided that the best use of the Arabs was to attack the enemy line of communication

This premise, though, violated some basic principles of European warfare Lawrence was just the person to overcome that intellectual bias "Victory could only be purchased by blood (the classic military strategic theory postulated)," Lawrence wrote, "This was a hard saying for us, as the Arabs had no organized forces, and so a Turkish Foch would have no aim and the Arabs would not endure casualties, so that an Arab Clausewitz could not buy his victory Our way of war seemed unlike the ritual of war of which Foch had been priest, so I began to hope there was some difference of kind between us and him"²³

Lawrence's solution was a classic example of what would become known as "the indirect approach" His strategy had three basic components the Algebraic element of things, the Biological element of lives, and the Psychological element of ideas The first encompassed the known invariables which impacted on military operations -- time, space, weather, terrain The second involved the human spirit, and here the Arab culture of independence, self-sufficiency, value of the individual, and religious motivation "suggested that the Arabs should focus on the destruction of material, rather than on the Turkish Army itself"²⁴ Finally, the third part of the strategy, the psychological factor, required what Lawrence called "the adjustment of spirit -- more subtle than tactics and better worth doing"²⁵ Here again, Lawrence was calculating the importance of understanding the Arab mind in order to motivate them to fight He certainly

mastered the process, as the results indicate

PART IV: IMPLICATIONS OF THE LAWRENCE EXAMPLE

B H Liddell Hart, one of the foremost strategic thinkers of the 20th Century, deeply admired Lawrence “But for him,” Liddell Hart wrote, “the Arab Revolt would have remained a collection of slight and passing incidents”²⁶ There is no question that Lawrence’s impact on the Arab success in the revolt was truly significant The same holds true for the British, who reaped huge benefits from the Lawrence-inspired Arab victories Aside from the material support, the British investment in the Arab revolt was less than 100 men For that, they achieved an economy of force mission success which tied up 50,000 Turks for over two years Few, if any, operations have known that level of success before or since Lawrence’s superiors credited him with achieving credibility for Arab operations that did not exist before “The advantages offered by Arab cooperation on lines proposed by Captain Lawrence,” Allenby wrote after the Arab capture of Aqaba, “are, in my opinion, of such importance that no effort should be spared to reap full benefit therefrom”²⁷

Critical to Lawrence’s success was his willingness to adopt a new approach to the strategic situation he encountered when he became liaison to Feisal He had to do far more than wear the trappings of an Arab prince, rather, he had to accept their cultural perspective and look through their eyes as well as his own As Sir Andrew Macphail recounts, that acceptance meant sometimes overcoming his more civilized tendencies “He (Lawrence) was compelled to kill his own wounded ‘The Turks did not take Arab prisoners Indeed, they used to treat them horribly,

so, in mercy, we were finishing those of our badly wounded who would have to be left helpless on abandoned ground ""²⁸ It was often grisly work in the aftermath of destroying a train loaded with Turkish troops and supplies, too, for Lawrence had to allow the aftermath to proceed in the Arab cultural tradition -- no prisoners taken, and whatever remained was there for the taking and use as desired It only takes a small amount of imagination to conjure up images of what those scenes must have been

Guerilla war, that form of protracted conflict which targets the enemy's endurance and will rather than his forces in pitched battle, was the exact remedy for the Arab fortunes during the revolt Lawrence was able to develop this concept in the swirling sands of the Arabian desert because he had both the inclination and the experience to effectively employ cultural factors present in the Arab forces The achievements which made him famous were the result of both opportunity and circumstance, for as Liddell Hart wrote, "In the desert he found, like them (the Arabs), the stark simplicity that suited him, and although he never lost the power to adapt himself to, and appreciate, the more subtle pleasures of civilized society, it was in the desert that he found the solitude that satisfied his deepest instinct ""²⁹ So, the conditions of Arab life and the revolt Hussein sponsored offered Lawrence the opportunity to be in the right place at the right time It was he alone, though, who took advantage of that moment

While we cannot reasonably expect a cadre of Lawrences to emerge at the right time and place to handle the strategic contingencies we face now and in the future, there are steps we must take to give ourselves the best chance of having people such as Lawrence in key positions when needed The implications for the strategist are clear

- 1 Strategists must incorporate the cultural paradigm into the strategic framework
- 2 Military organizations must cultivate leaders who appreciate cultural factors in strategy formulation
- 3 Institutions such as the National War College must adopt cultural paradigms in their strategy curricula

There will be less time to develop our strategies in the future, as information becomes more accessible, the national leadership demands more rapid response from the military, and the definition of success expands far beyond the simple defeat of an enemy's armed forces. Nonetheless, the three steps outlined above provide a range of possible improvements to our current process.

We must continue to define and develop methodologies for understanding cultural factors for both wars among nations and those which are transnational. The implications of Lawrence's success are primarily that he succeeded because he was well suited to understand cultural factors in strategy, and apply them in a difficult situation. We must institutionalize that capability to the best extent possible. Additionally, we must develop a clear understanding among our leaders that there are now several levels of war -- all of which deserve intellectual exploration of how culture affects strategy. Lawrence correctly identified the type of war he was fighting, and then took steps to give the Arabs the best chance to win. His understanding of the Arab culture was critical to his ability to help them, as well as the British, defeat the Turks.

PART V: CONCLUSION

Lawrence was an officer literally thinking and acting “outside the box”, and it is remarkable he survived in the highly structured, ethnocentric British officer corps. He was often abrasive, arrogant, and had little respect for his superiors when he felt they did not deserve to be in a position of responsibility. After the war, Lawrence convinced many he was more than eccentric when he resigned his commission, drifted about before joining the Royal Air Force as a private, was pushed out after a short time only to join the Tank Corps at the same level, then returned to the Air Force. For years, he toiled away as an enlisted airman, shunning the global recognition he commanded as a hero (glorified by none other than the radio star Lowell Thomas). He died in a motorcycle accident in 1935, swerving to avoid a couple of boys he came upon suddenly. Lawrence was 47 years old, having been a recognized figure in Britain and much of the rest of the world since his late twenties.

A trusted acquaintance of Winston Churchill, Lawrence had the ear of many of Britain’s most notable leaders during and after his famous exploits. And his stature in the Arab lands was even greater than the fame he enjoyed at home. When traveling once with Churchill in Gaza after the war, the power Lawrence commanded became quite evident, at least in the eyes of one member of the party. “We were just a knot of Europeans with hats on. Lawrence was the man. No Pope of Rome ever had more command before his own worshipers in the Palazzo. And Colonel Lawrence raised his hand slowly, the first and second fingers lifted above the other two

for silence and for blessing. He could have owned their earth. He did own it. Every man froze in respect.”³⁰

His reputation notwithstanding, Lawrence's strategic skills are the true essence of the contribution he made to the art of war -- particularly with regard to his keen understanding of the role culture plays in formulating strategy. Eccentric in some ways, Lawrence nonetheless possessed remarkable adaptive insights, and he employed these talents to perfection in Feisal's camp. As many Arab and British leaders observed then and still note, the young English officer had particular abilities in dealing with the Arabs and in understanding both them and the enemy they faced. Fortunately for the British and the Arabs, Lawrence established and maintained a high degree of credibility through demonstrated performance. It is quite likely that, had both parties continued their pattern of fighting the Turks in conventional terms such as they did before Lawrence became liaison to Feisal, the war in the Middle East would have gone much worse for them -- perhaps even resulted in defeat.

The evidence suggests Lawrence was disposed toward better understanding of the Arabs and the war they were fighting because he was prepared to view them in a realistic way. His background and personality were ideally suited to the circumstances he found himself in on that December day in 1916 when he rode into the Arab camp as liaison officer to Feisal. It is all the more astonishing when the circumstances are carefully examined, for by all rights Lawrence should have been a pompous bore whom the Arabs rejected out of hand. The British military system was far more prone to produce that kind of officer than the one Lawrence became. There was an officer corps largely intolerant and contemptuous of other armies and their leaders, the culture behind those armies was often even less of a concern. It is fortunate, then, that Lawrence

appeared at the right place and time, for he probably would not have survived long in the British Army had he been channeled into a more “normal” career pattern

For our purposes, Lawrence’s achievements point the way for tremendous progress in strategy formulation -- if we are smart enough to use the lessons he left us. Bruce Hart, in a recent paper, suggested that one lasting way to make effective use of Lawrence’s legacy would be to create a corps of officers and non-commissioned officers with unique language and cultural skills in the regions where we expect potential threats to our interests.³¹ His suggestion indicates others are now seriously considering the importance we must place on cultural understanding as a key element of strategy. Certainly the breakdown of nations and the rise of cultural anxieties on a massive scale demands more sophisticated understanding of social identities than ever before.

The British forces on the outbreak of World War I were not specialists in adapting to the cultures they happened to be operating with or against, on the contrary, they were commonly looked upon as insular in both thought as well as geographic location. They had the advantage of being largely a colonial force (i.e. they had manpower to recruit from their colonies, like the unfortunate Indians at Kut), however, that is an advantage we cannot expect to enjoy in the foreseeable future. Thus, our future will most likely be a series of circumstances where we have to enter a potentially hostile environment with little time to organize support, few forces available, and tremendous demands placed on military leaders to succeed quickly at minimum cost. Guerrilla wars, such as the one the Arabs waged against the Turks from 1916 to 1918, will be prevalent in many parts of the world. Lawrence would, of course, advocate using those enterprising young officers who had already spent some time there as liaison officers to the indigenous forces. His experiences demonstrate the invaluable service local cultural experts can

provide We face the very real possibility of not having any experts, though, particularly with the impending demise of the U S Army's Foreign Area Officer Program

Lawrence's achievements have been downplayed by some, but the facts speak for themselves Even if only half of what he alleges to have done, or others say he did, is true, his accomplishments are remarkable Within the context of the world in which he lived, he was a controversial figure who nonetheless commanded the respect of everyone he served with Moreover, his development of a brilliant strategy most likely saved British interests in the Middle East, not to mention the Arab opportunity for self-determination Lawrence was an Anglophile, to be sure, but he was also a realist And he deserves far more intellectual credit than we have given him Now is the time to put the lessons of this innovative military strategist to work, developing new approaches for the 21st Century that are focused on the crucial role culture plays in strategic planning We must change our strategic framework to reflect the legacy T E Lawrence left us, and thus better prepare for tomorrow's wars Our soldiers deserve no less

ENDNOTES

- 1 Paul M Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Cultures in Conflict," in Parameters, (Volume XXVI, Number 1, Spring 1996), p 34
- 2 This definition is from the AS315 class led by Col Dave McIntyre, Topic 2, conducted in January 1996 I acknowledge that there are many definitions of culture one might use, however, for purposes of this essay I will use the one described herein, because it a comprehensive statement of the elements we commonly associate with culture
- 3 This statement was made by COL Dave McIntyre in his Course Overview for the AS315 Course, Spring 1996 at the National War College, "Culture and Strategy in War and Peace," p iv
- 4 The Deibel Model is so named for Professor Terry Deibel, who directs the National War College course on the nature of strategy formulation This model is the most common among several used by the students and faculty Because of this model's widespread use at NWC, I have chosen to use it for the purposes of this paper The same flaw exists, however, in all versions of strategic framework used at the National War College -- culture receives short shrift
- 5 JCS Joint Publication Number 3 is the principal document dealing with the formulation of strategy Pub 3 and the models (such as the one described in note 4) are the "frameworks" students use at the National War College and other high level institutions Traditional elements pervade these frameworks -- based on an enemy with conventional forces, representing an established nation-state A copy of the Deibel Model is attached as Appendix A
- 6 John W Taylor, "Military Strategy and How To Think About It," unpublished article, National War College, p 1 Cited in an unpublished classroom handout, "Framework for Military Strategy," by the NWC Department of Military Strategy and Operations, 1993, p 1
- 7 This term was used in reference to Lawrence on several occasions, most notably when he joined the Royal Tank Corps after World War I See Robert Graves' Lawrence and the Arabian Adventure, (Garden City Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), p 27
- 8 Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia. The Authorized Biography of T.E. Lawrence, (New York Atheneum Books, 1990), p 23
- 9 C M Doughty as quoted in Wilson's Lawrence, p 53
- 10 Wilson, p 23
- 11 Sir Andrew Macphail, Three Persons, (London Louis Carrier and Company, 1929), p 314
- 12 Wilson, p 278

13 Lawrence as quoted by H A De Weerd, Great Soldiers of the Two World Wars, (New York W W Norton & Company, 1941), p 137

14 Ibid

15 Ibid , p 138

16 Wilson, quoting Lawrence in The Seven Pillars of Islam, (New York Doubleday and Co , 1938), which he cites as being in Chapter 24

17 T E Lawrence, Oriental Assembly, edited by A W Lawrence,(New York E P Dutton and Company, 1940), p 105

18 Ibid , p 107

19 Ibid , p 143

20 According to Suleiman Mousa, in his T.E. Lawrence. An Arab View, (London Oxford University Press, 1966), p 257, Great Britain spent 750,000,000 pounds on the Western Front during WWI, and 10,000,000 pounds supporting the Arab revolt The actual numbers vary, and Mousa's numbers may well be inflated, however, there is no doubt that the British saved thousands of lives for a mere fraction of the cost of the Western Front The strategic gains were certainly worth the money

21 Lawrence, p 117-118

22 Nouri Al Said as quoted by Konrad Morsey in "T E Lawrence Strategist," in The T.E. Lawrence Puzzle, edited by Stephen E Tabachnick, (Athens University of Georgia Press, 1984), p 191

23 Lawrence, p 109-110

24 Bruce W Hart, "T E Lawrence, Liddell Hart, and Limited Conflict," (Course II Paper prepared for requirements of the National War College, Class of 1995), p 5 I am indebted to Bruce for his excellent distillation of Lawrence's 3 pronged strategic theory as it applied to the Arab campaigns See also Konrad Morsey's chapter referenced in Endnote 22 for a good description of the indirect approach according to Lawrence

25 T E Lawrence, The Seven Pillars Of Islam, (New York Doubleday and Company, 1938), p 195

26 B H Liddell Hart, Colonel Lawrence. The Man Behind the Legend, (New York Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1934), p v

27 Morsey p 191

28 Macphail, p 319

29 B H Liddell Hart, Colonel Lawrence. The Man Behind the Legend, (New York Dodd, Mead & Co ,1934), p 12

30 Walter Henry Thompson, Assignment. Churchill, (New York Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1955),p 30

31 Hart, p 9

From Lawrence of Arabia The T E Lawrence
Annotated Biography, p. 304



Map 4 The Red Sea Campaign

FRAMEWORK FOR MILITARY STRATEGY

1. ANALYZE MISSION

A. Evaluate the national political objectives

- Understand desired strategic end state
- Evaluate domestic/international context and assumptions
- Recommend adjustments as required

B. Formulate military objectives

- Ensure objectives lead to termination and desired end state
- Exploit enemy center(s) of gravity
- Determine and prioritize essential specified and implied tasks

C. Write the mission statement

- Specify who, what, when, why, and where
- Ensure the military mission matches the desired political aim

2. ANALYZE SITUATION AND DEVELOP COURSES OF ACTION

A. Analyze the situation

- Assess geostrategic context
- Assess enemy and friendly capabilities and vulnerabilities
- Evaluate assumptions and restrictions on military planning and operations

B. Develop courses of action

- Identify physical, fiscal, and political constraints
- Exploit weakness with strength while disguising/protecting own weaknesses
- If at peace, determine kinds of deterrents (punish, denial, threat)
- If conducting operations other than war, determine type(s)
- If at war, determine: kind of war (limited or general); type of operation (offense or defense); method of employment (direct or indirect); and form of military strategy (e.g., annihilation, attrition, or disruption)
- State all suitable, feasible, acceptable courses

3. ANALYZE COURSES OF ACTION

- Identify likely enemy courses of action
- Weigh each enemy course against each friendly course to determine probable effects and outcomes
- List advantages and disadvantages of each friendly course

4. COMPARE OWN COURSES OF ACTION

- Weigh advantages and disadvantages with respect to desired end state
- Assess benefits, costs, and risks
- If warranted, combine elements of two or more courses into one

5. DECIDE

- Recommend best course and most promising alternative(s) with assessments of benefits, costs, risks
- Continually reassess and adjust objectives, resources, concepts as needed