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A Theoretical Exploration of Lawrence of Arabia's Inner Meanings on Guerrilla Warfare

by Basil Aboul-Enein and Youssef Aboul-Enein

Most wars are wars of contact...ours should be a war of detachment. We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert... - T.E Lawrence

Defining Guerrilla War

The concept of guerrilla warfare dates back as far as ancient times. Since the earliest days it has been a tactic of war used by every class of man against those defined as invaders and oppressors. Hannibal Barca's early victories against Rome are owed considerably to how he acted unexpectedly by taking an impossible route through the Alps to ambush the Roman armies. His ruses were so constant, his stratagems so subtle that the Romans felt constantly insecure, off-balance, and on edge. Hannibal was stymied by Quintus Fabius Maximus, who turned the Roman army into virtually a guerrilla force. His forces shadowed Hannibal's marches, harassed his foragers, cut off stragglers, nipped off stray patrols, but Maximus never allowed himself to be drawn into a full-scale fight.

History certainly offers countless examples of guerrilla actions, normally of an independent type undertaken in self-defense by nomads and peasant bands. They usually resulted in little more than temporary embarrassment to the incumbent ruler or organized invader. In 512 B.C, Persian King Darius attacked the Scythians, allegedly penetrating into their land after crossing the Danube. Greek historian, Herodotus, relates that the Scythians succeeded in frustrating the Persian army by letting it traverse through the entire country without an engagement. Herodotus claimed that the numerically inferior and impoverished Scythian army used guerrilla tactics, which included an ancient version of scorched-earth policy. Alexander the Great encountered guerrilla opposition when he campaigned against the Persian General Bessus, the assassin of Darius III, prior to invading India. This two year campaign in the Persian satrapies of modern-day Afghan Turkestan certainly tested Alexander to his limits.¹

Interestingly, as T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) would say during the Arab revolt, "the terrain better suited our tactics and we waited for them...we had every advantage, of time, of terrain, of number, of weather, and could checkmate them easily."² Lawrence seemed to have maintained that the Ottoman Turks would have needed six hundred thousand men to control Arabia, but as they had only a hundred thousand they were destined to fail. Consequently, in

¹ Asprey, Robert. *War in the shadows: The Guerrilla in history*, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2002), 4

² T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom. A Triumph*, (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1991), 170-288.

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Seven Pillars of Wisdom, Lawrence explained that “the death of a Turkish bridge or rail, machine or gun, or high explosive was more profitable than the death of a Turk. Our cue was to destroy, not the Turk’s army, but his minerals.”³ But why did the Arab insurrection become so effective under the tutelage of this eloquent British Army intelligence officer educated in Oxford?⁴

Ottoman Empire: The Sick Man of Europe

The history of the Ottoman Empire began almost simultaneously with the decline of the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman state in 1500 was one of the most powerful in the world, surpassed perhaps only by China. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire extended from Baku in Azerbaijan to Algiers in North Africa. For over four centuries, the Ottoman Empire had ruled the Arab Middle-East stretching its influence from Constantinople to Mecca and Yemen. But the empire began weakening by the late 19th and early 20th century. Britain, France and Russia threatened to move in if the Empire collapsed, and with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, that threat became a real possibility.⁵

As Europe made preparations for war, major alliances were formed between Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, along with the Kingdom of Bulgaria as a minor partner. Berlin offered military and strategic support to the Ottomans, which included the building of railways, and specifically, the continued building of the Berlin-Baghdad railway. Of note, the Ottomans were experimenting with constitutional reforms, and major leaders of the Young Turk movement, namely its head, Enver Pasha, were pro-German. Interestingly, one of the proposed train stops of the railway sat on the route of an archeological site, Carchemish, where archeologist T. E. Lawrence was working. At this moment he would begin his career in military intelligence.⁶

The Hashemite Clan

Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, was born into a lesser clan of the Quraysh tribe, the Banu Hashim, or Hashemite clan. Thanks to Muhammad, this clan gained enormous prestige and a place in modern Arab history as well as deep in the roots of Arab nationalism. The roots of the royal family of Jordan and of Iraq, prior to 1958, are linked to the Hashemite clan. According to Lawrence, “the position of the Sharif of Mecca had long been anomalous. The title of „Sharif” implied descent from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, her husband and Muhammad’s cousin Ali, and Hassan, the elder son of Fatima and Ali. Authentic Sharifs were inscribed on the family tree – an immense role was created in Mecca, in whose custody the Emir of Mecca, the elected Sharif of Sharifs, was supposed to be the senior and noblest of all. The Prophet Muhammad’s family had held temporal rule in Mecca for the last nine hundred years, and counted some two thousand persons.”⁷ What is little known is that the Ottoman Sultan designated the Sharif of Mecca from among the Hashemite Clan and made members of the clan compete vigorously for his favor.

⁴ Ibid Lawrence, 476.

⁴ Ibid Lawrence, 476.

⁵ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-150.

⁶ “Letter from T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) to Leonard Woolley.” *The British Museum*.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/archives/l/letter_from_te_lawrence_law.aspx (accessed May 5, 2010).

⁷ Ibid Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 49.

The Arab intellectuals of Damascus, which is considered the emotional center of Arab nationalism, along with the Hashemite clan of the Hejaz (The Red Sea Coast of Arabia from southern Jordan to Yemen) sought to rid themselves of Ottoman influence and set up an independent Arab state. Britain began soliciting the Arabs to join them against the Ottomans. In mid-October a message was sent to Prince Abdullah, one of the sons of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, who was the Sharif of Mecca. The message from Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, ask whether the Arabs would be for us (Great Britain) or against us (Great Britain) if the Ottoman Turks joined Germany. Abdullah's reply on behalf of Hussein indicated that the Sharif would not willingly support the Turks, especially if Britain were to guarantee the Hejaz against Ottoman aggression. His Majesty's Government stated that if the „Arab nation“ supported Britain in the war, the British would recognize and support the independence of the Amirate and of the Arabs, and further, would guarantee Arabia against external aggression. The political scheme of the British offer was mainly to lure the Hashemites into rebellion against the Ottomans, and thus Arab Revolt would be born. However, the British and their French allies secretly had plans of their own for the future Ottoman dominions of the Arab East.⁸

T.E. Lawrence and Military Thought

According to J. A. English's 1987 essay Lawrence big ideas in the realm of war, war was not only an affair of flesh and blood, but one of ideas. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is more than epic history and an egotistical look at the Arab Revolt from Lawrence's perspective. Its pages hide the profound ideas of military thought that remain relevant today. Lawrence's military leadership has been compared with that of Napoleon and Marlborough. He is hailed as the progenitor and master of modern guerrilla warfare, from which Lord Wavell and General Orde Wingate drew lessons of strategy and tactics. According to Sir Basil Liddell Hart, the widespread use of guerrilla warfare from World War II onwards can be indirectly attributed in some way to Lawrence.⁹

In a truly professional military sense, Lawrence's military wit was due directly to the depth of his personal learning. At age fifteen he began reading what he subsequently described as "the usual school boy stuff," including Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*; Napier's *History of the War in the Peninsula*; Coxe's *Marlborough*; Mahan's *Influence of Sea-Power Upon History*; and Henderson's *Stonewall Jackson*. Lawrence began reading many treatises by scholars of antiquity such as the Roman Vegetius and the Byzantine Procopius, military secretary to Belisarius, who practiced the avoidance of pitched battles. He studied the tactics of Henry of Navarre and increasingly the Crusades became the subject of considerable interest, ultimately prompting his 1909 four month tour of Syria to study Crusader castles for which he wrote his thesis on "The Military Architecture of the Crusades."¹⁰

His intellect eventually took him past the tactical campaigns of the past, such as Hannibal, Belisarius, and Napoleon to Clausewitz, to reflecting on Moltke the Elder, Jomini and Willisen. Lawrence began discovering broader principles in Guibert, Bourcet and 18th century

⁸ Timothy Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites, and Arab rule, 1920-1925: the Sherifian solution*, (Portland, OR: Frank Cass publishers, 2003), 22-23.

⁹ J.A English, "Kindergarten soldier: The military thought of Lawrence of Arabia." *Military Affairs* Jan 1987, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid English, 8.

thinkers. Carl von Clausewitz, however, proved to be “intellectually so much the master of them and his book so logical and fascinating,” that Lawrence “unconsciously accepted his finality.”¹¹

Thus it was that he came to be “obsessed by the dictum of Foch” that the aim in absolute war was to seek “the destruction of the organized forces of the enemy by the one process – battle.”¹² Lawrence not only read these works but pondered them, and likely argued with the authors in his mind, shaping new ideas of his own.

At this point, his concerns centered mainly on the abstract, “the theory and philosophy of warfare from the metaphysical side.”¹³ He would soon find himself advisor to Emir Faisal, son of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca, who was compelled suddenly to action to find an immediate link between book reading and tactical movement. The Arab Revolt began initially with abortive attacks by novice Arab tribesmen on Turkish garrisons in Medina and Mecca. Not surprisingly, Lawrence began to accept that it was possible to follow the direction of Marshal Maurice de Saxe and attain victory without battle.¹⁴

Moreover, Lawrence postulated that because Arab irregulars constituted no organized force, a “Turkish Foch” could not really have an aim. It appeared to him that the Fochian idea represented what is described as a highly “exterminative” variety of war, “no more absolute than another.”¹⁵ This meant it was futile for the Arabs to engage in head on confrontation with regular Ottoman forces, or to do what they excelled at, which was harass and retreat style tactics. It reminded him that Clausewitz enumerated all sorts of war, from personal wars, joint-proxy duels for dynastic reasons, and commercial wars. Lawrence ventured that the Arab aim was “geographical, to extrude the Turks from all Arab-speaking lands.”¹⁶ This geographic element determined the course of the Arab Revolt. Lawrence proceeded to juxtapose “the whole house of war in its structural aspect, which was strategy, in its arrangements, which were tactics, and in the sentiment of its inhabitants, which was psychology.”¹⁷

According to Liddell Hart, Lawrence “was more deeply steeped in knowledge of war than any other general of the [Great] war.”¹⁸ He was also, according to British Brigadier General Shelford Bidwell, able to say “as much in one paragraph as Clausewitz says in a chapter.”¹⁹ But if Lawrence's highly intellectual approach enabled him to master strategy, his tactical skills were founded upon practical experience and an uncanny ability to appreciate a situation rationally. To Lawrence, strategy was “eternal, and the same and true,” but tactics were “the ever-changing languages through which it speaks.”²⁰

When Lawrence published “*The Evolution of a Revolt*,” it exerted a profound and seductive influence upon Liddell Hart, who was already disillusioned by the seemingly senseless attrition of the Great War. He would later state in his memoirs that they had a “brief exchange of letters in 1921 about ... [this] reflective article,”²¹ and in 1934 Hart published a detailed

¹¹ Ibid English, 7-8.

¹² Ibid English, 8.

¹³ Ibid English, 8.

¹⁴ Ibid English, 8.

¹⁵ Ibid English, 15.

¹⁶ Ibid English.

¹⁷ Ibid English.

¹⁸ Ibid English.

¹⁹ Ibid English.

²⁰ Ibid English.

²¹ Ibid English.

biography of Lawrence. In it he debunked Clausewitz and linked Lawrence to de Saxe, who always “kept his mind on the ultimate aim of war, to which battle is only a means.”²² Essentially, it reiterated the general avoidance of pitched battles, the influence of ideas, the use of indirect pressures, and the value of small, highly mobile forces of intense firepower. In regards to Clausewitz, Lawrence’s major criticism of the great Prussian theorist was that the “logical system of Clausewitz . . . leads astray his disciples - those of them, at least, who would rather fight with their arms than with their legs.”²³ Lawrence seems to have balanced Clausewitz with de Saxe, who warned of the perils of the blind, unthinking adoption of military maxims.²⁴

It would appear that Lawrence's depth of military thought and theory makes him more than just the father of modern guerrilla warfare. The charge of Liddell Hart's theory of the Indirect Approach is based on a limited interpretation of irregular warfare, and applied to regular warfare, and must be dismissed accordingly. This of course, is not to say that Lawrence is not deserving of being called the intellectual apostle of the guerrilla and deliberate exploitation of insurgency phenomena. There is reasonable evidence to indicate that the philosophically inclined Chinese took his ideas seriously.²⁵

In 1936, a Western observer noted that General Lu Cheng-Ts'ao, commander of the Central Hopei Communist guerrillas, had a copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The Chinese commander stated at the time that he and other guerrilla leaders considered it to be “one of the standard reference books on strategy.”²⁶ There is also reason to believe that, even more than Sun Tzu, Lawrence has for many years been discreetly plagiarized by Mao Zedong and his associates.²⁷

What Lawrence really did was not devise a prescription for modern guerrilla warfare; his method was essentially antithetic to the compartmentalization of war. Instead, he looked at the whole of warfare to confirm the strategic and tactical courses of action adapting them to the Arabian scene. To Lawrence, war was "antinomian," subject to rules, perhaps, but certainly not laws and, in accord with de Saxe's conception of war, as "obscure and imperfect."²⁸ From Clausewitz he also knew that “two wars seemed seldom alike,” and that often “the parties did not know their aim and blundered till the march of events took control.”²⁹ He thus mobilized his intellect to compensate for inferior military strength. He was creative rather than methodical in his approach, and he gainfully adopted the tactics of the weak.³⁰

“We kindergarten soldiers,” Lawrence wrote, “were beginning our art of war in the atmosphere of the twentieth century, receiving our weapons without prejudice. To the regular officer, with the tradition of forty generations of service behind him, the antique arms were the most favored.” Not surprisingly, this “kindergarten soldier” strongly recommended that “new soldiers . . . read and mark and learn things outside drill manuals and tactical diagrams,” for he

²² Ibid English.

²³ Ibid English.

²⁴ Ibid English.

²⁵ Ibid English.

²⁶ Ibid English.

²⁷ Ibid English.

²⁸ Ibid English.

²⁹ Ibid English.

³⁰ Ibid English.

knew much better than most that, “with 2,000 years of examples behind us we have no excuse, when fighting, for not fighting well.”³¹

The Science of Guerrilla Tactics: Lawrence’s Account

According to Lawrence, tactics should be based on “tip and run: not pushes, but strokes. We should never try to improve our advantage. We should use the smallest force in the quickest time at the farthest place. Sure of an unhindered retreat into their desert-climate which the Turks could not explore.”³²

In Lawrence’s account in *The Evolution of a Revolt*, the first confusion he suspected was a false antithesis between strategy and tactics. To Lawrence, these were “only points of view from which to ponder the elements of war.”³³ He stated there were three elements, the Algebraical element of things (*hecastics*), the Biological element of lives (*bionomics*), and the Psychological element of ideas (*diathetics*). The first element, or hecastics as Lawrence termed it, appeared to be purely scientific, subject to the laws of mathematics, devoid of humanity, and essentially formidably dealing with known invariables, fixed conditions, space and time, inorganic things like hills and climates and railways.³⁴

In the Arab case, this aspect meant focusing on how the Turks would defend the areas to be liberated. In Lawrence’s view, it would take the form of “a trench line across the bottom if we came like an army with banners.” But, he reasoned,

Suppose we were an influence (as we might be), an idea, a thing invulnerable, intangible, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile as a whole, firm-rooted, and nourished through long stems to the head, we might be a vapor, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man’s mind, as we wanted nothing material to live on, so perhaps we offered nothing material to the killing. It seemed a regular soldier might be helpless without a target. He would own the ground he sat on, and what he could poke his rifle at.³⁵

In Liddell Hart’s excerpt on Guerrilla warfare, an essay titled “*Science of guerrilla warfare*” was taken from Lawrence’s account in the desert. The Arab Revolt, according to Lawrence, began in June 1916, with an attack by the “half-armed and inexperienced tribesmen upon the Turkish garrisons in Medina and about Mecca.” They met with little to no success, and after some effort withdrew out of range and started a blockade. This method forced the early Turkish surrender of Mecca and at this point the campaign remained stagnant for several weeks. The Turks prepared to send an expeditionary force to Mecca, to crush the revolt at its source, and accordingly moved an army corps to Medina by rail.³⁶

The Turks began to advance down from Medina to Mecca, a distance of about 250 miles. They came to a belt of hills twenty miles wide, in which were Feisal’s Arab tribesmen standing on the defensive, “next a level stretch, for 70 miles along the coastal plain to Rabegh, rather

³¹ Ibid English, 10.

³² Ibid Lawrence, 337.

³³ T.E Lawrence, “The Evolution of a Revolt,” *The Army Quarterly* 1, October 1920, 55-69.

³⁴ Ibid Lawrence, “The Evolution of a Revolt,” , 60-69.

³⁵ Ibid Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom. A Triumph*, 192.

³⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed. 1929. The entry for 'Guerilla' contains, 'Science of Guerilla Warfare', signed 'T. E. La' (pp. 950-3). The text of this article was edited by B. H. Liddell Hart from T. E. Lawrence’s writings on the subject (see *T. E. Lawrence to his biographer Liddell Hart*, pp. 1-4).

more than half-way.”³⁷ Rabegh is a port on the Red Sea, with good anchorage for ships, and because of its placement was regarded as the key to Mecca. Here lay Sharif Ali, Feisal’s eldest brother, with more tribal forces, and “the beginning of an Arab regular army, formed from officers and men of Arab blood who had served in the Turkish Army.”³⁸ Lawrence describes “as was almost inevitable in view of the general course of military thinking since Napoleon, the soldiers of all countries looked only to the regulars to win the war. Military opinion was obsessed by the dictum of Foch that the ethic of modern war is to seek for the enemy’s army, his centre of power, and destroy it in battle. Irregulars would not attack positions and so they were regarded as incapable of forcing a decision.”³⁹

While these Arab regulars were still being trained, the Ottoman Turks suddenly began their advance on Mecca. They broke through the hills in 24 hours, and “so proved the second theorem of irregular war, namely, that irregular troops are as unable to defend a point or line as they are to attack it.”⁴⁰ To Lawrence, the Turkish army was “an accident, not a target. Our true strategic aim was to seek its weakest link, and bear only on that until time made the mass of it fall.” Lawrence explained that the “Arab army must impose the longest possible passive defense on the Turks (this being the most materially expensive form of war) by extending its own front to the maximum. Tactically it must develop a highly mobile, equipped type of force, of the smallest size, and use it successively at distributed points of the Turkish line, to make the Turks reinforce their occupying posts beyond the economic minimum. The power of this striking force would not be reckoned simply by its strength. The ratio between number and area determined the character of the war, and by having five times the mobility of the Turks the Arabs could be on terms with them with one-fifth their number.”⁴¹

Lawrence correlated the desert fighting style of guerrilla warfare to naval warfare. “In character these operations were like naval warfare, in their mobility, their ubiquity, their independence of bases and communications, in their ignoring of ground features, of strategic areas, of fixed directions, of fixed points.”⁴² Lawrence went on saying that “he who commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much or as little of the war as he will and he who commands the desert is equally fortunate.”⁴³ Camel raiding-parties are like self-contained like ships. They could cruise securely along the enemy’s land-frontier, just out of sight of his posts along the edge of cultivation, and tap or raid into his lines where it seemed easiest and benefiting, with a sure retreat always behind them into an element which the Turks could not enter. Lawrence articulated the essentials of sporadic movements as

Guerrillas must be allowed liberal work-room. In irregular war if two men are together one is being wasted. The moral strain of isolated action makes this simple form of war very hard on the individual soldier, and exacts from him special initiative, endurance and enthusiasm. Here the ideal was to make action a series of single combats to make the ranks a happy alliance of commanders-in-chief. The value of the Arab army depended entirely on quality, not on quantity. The members had to keep always cool, for the excitement of a blood-lust would impair their

³⁷ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1923.

³⁸ Ibid Liddell Hart.

³⁹ Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴⁰ Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴¹ Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴² Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴³ Ibid Liddell Hart.

science, and their victory depended on a just use of speed, concealment, accuracy of fire. Guerrilla war is far more intellectual than a bayonet charge.⁴⁴

Lawrence concludes in the excerpt that “rebellion must have an unassailable base, something guarded not merely from attack, but from the fear of it: such a base as the Arab revolt had in the Red Sea ports, the desert, or in the minds of men converted to its creed.” It must compose of a sophisticated alien enemy, in the form of “a disciplined army of occupation too small to fulfill the doctrine of acreage: too few to adjust number to space, in order to dominate the whole area effectively from fortified posts.” It must have a “friendly population, not actively friendly, but sympathetic to the point of not betraying rebel movements to the enemy. Rebellions can be made by 2% active in a striking force, and 98% passively sympathetic.” The active rebels must have the qualities of “speed and endurance, ubiquity and independence of arteries of supply. They must have the technical equipment to destroy or paralyze the enemy’s organized communications, for irregular war is fairly Willisen’s definition of strategy, „the study of communication,“ in its extreme degree, of attack where the enemy is not.”⁴⁵

Lawrence ends his thesis summarizing rebel warfare as “granted mobility, security (in the form of denying targets to the enemy), time, and doctrine (the idea to convert every subject to friendliness), victory will rest with the insurgents, for the algebraical factors are in the end decisive, and against them perfections of means and spirit struggle quite in vain.”⁴⁶ The common dispositions in Lawrence’s work seem to list the following requirements for a successful guerilla campaign: an unassailable physical or emotional base; a relatively friendly local population; mobility, flexibility and endurance; the ability to inflict damage on the enemy’s ability of communication; and, lastly, an enemy too few in number to successfully occupy the territory of concern.⁴⁷

Interestingly, an article by Brito and Intriligator set out to synthesize and describe the mathematical dynamics of the stages of guerrilla war against an established government. The article combined two classical economic models, the Solow growth model and the Ricardian model of economic rent, with two classic studies of guerrilla warfare by T.E Lawrence and Mao Zedong. Four different Ricardian distribution functions describe the country: the *resources* the guerrillas can extract from territory under their control; the *porosity* of the country, indicating the guerrilla’s ability to obtain weapons; the government’s *ability to tax*; and the *mobility* of the guerrillas. The follow variables were proposed:

x = territory controlled by the guerrillas;

y = ratio between the guerrilla and the government forces;

v_1 = guerrilla resources devoted to fighting

u_1 = guerrilla resources devoted to training

v_2 = government resources devoted to fighting

u_2 = government resources devoted to training.

⁴⁴ Ibid Liddell Hart

⁴⁵ Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴⁶ Ibid Liddell Hart.

⁴⁷ Ibid Liddell Hart.

This model, the author explains, appears to be consistent with the historical pattern of guerrilla war.⁴⁸

The Legacy of the Desert Campaign in Military Theory

According to historian Lawrence James, Lawrence did not invent the concept of the Arab guerrilla war, although after the war he provided it with an elaborate intellectual justification in terms of military theory. The idea of utilizing Arab irregulars as guerrillas was originated before the start of the revolt. Major Bray, an Indian officer who had served in Hejaz, Sir William Robertson, the chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, discussed the idea in November 1916. Robertson opened the exchange stating, “I hear you are one of those fellows who think the Arab is no damn good at all?” “No sir, I think that you cannot expect them, in their present state of organization, to hold trenches against disciplined troops, but as guerrilla fighters they will be splendid.”⁴⁹

If Clausewitz’s formulation is a classic expression of guerrilla tactics as part of modern warfare, T.E Lawrence is often credited with the first theoretical contribution to understanding guerrilla warfare as a political movement furthered through unconventional tactics rather than as a military tactic supplementary to conventional warfare. According to Lt Col Frederick Wilkins, Lawrence “almost converted the tactics of guerrilla warfare into a science and claimed that no enemy could occupy a country employing guerrilla warfare unless every acre of land could be occupied with troops.” He elaborates, “in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence explained the plan that eventually defeated the Turks in Arabia. In the Turkish Army, materiel was scarce and precious, men more plentiful than equipment...the aim should be to destroy not the army but the materiel. Eventually, 35,000 Turkish casualties resulted from the new change in methods, but they were incidental to the attack on enemy material. The plan was to convince the Turks they could not stay, rather than to drive them out. The Turkish position gradually became impossible in Arabia. Garrisons withered and the effectiveness of the Turkish field force was largely on paper as the necessity for feeding the scattered units placed a heavy drain on the already burdened enemy supply system.”⁵⁰

Of all who understood this was Cuban revolutionary, Che Guevara, who, like Lawrence, understood that the most important immediate impact of guerrillas need not be military. Rather, by maintaining systematic pressure on isolated enemy posts as well as supply convoys and communications by striking from any point of the compass, at any time, “the guerrilla eroded the strength and morale of the enemy forces.”⁵¹ Similarly in Arabia, the energetic political work among the local populace developed invaluable military intelligence networks and sources of material support and personnel while winning over popular support for the insurgent cause. Thus, guerrilla warfare provided an ideal instrument for revolutionary political struggle when confronted against superior armed military forces.⁵²

⁴⁸ Dagobert L. Brito, & Michael D. Intriligator, “An economic model of guerrilla warfare,” *International Interactions* 15 (1990): 319.

⁴⁹ Lawrence James, *The golden warrior: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia*, (New York, NY: Skyhorse, 2008), 139.

⁵⁰ Che Guevara., B. Loveman & T. Davies. *Guerrilla warfare*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 3-4.

⁵¹ *Ibid* Guevara.

⁵² *Ibid* Guevara, 4-5.

Conclusion

Lawrence’s conception of the Arab East may not have come to what he envisaged, with Sykes-Picot looming in the foreground as he describes

we lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not learned to keep: and was pitifully weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace.⁵³

His achievements and contributions as a modern guerrilla leader and political strategist of the emerging nations indelibly assured his place, perhaps not alongside Clausewitz, Jomini or Mahan, but certainly in the annals of insurrectionary warfare. This warfare was to exemplify future desert guerrilla war such as the Libyan resistance movement of Omar Mukhtar or the Polisario incursions of Western Sahara. As this British warrior poet eloquently dreamt “the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act out their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible... This I did... I meant to make a new nation.”⁵⁴

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⁵³ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 24.