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## The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia

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“You have to understand the Arab mind,” Capt. Todd Brown, a company commander with the Fourth Infantry Division, said as he stood outside the gates of Abu Hishma. “The only thing they understand is force—force, pride and saving face.”

New York Times, December 7, 2003<sup>1</sup>

[T]hese gentlemen have formed a plan of *geographical morality*, by which the duties of men . . . are not to be governed by their relation to the great Governor of the Universe, or by their relation to mankind, but by climates, degrees of longitude, parallels, not of life, but of latitudes: as if, when you have crossed the equinoctial, all the virtues die . . . ; as if there were a kind of baptism, like that practised by seamen, by which they unbaptize themselves of all that they learned in Europe, and after which a new order and system of things commenced.

Edmund Burke, 1788<sup>2</sup>

JUST AFTER THE GREAT WAR, Britain designed a new system of imperial policing known as “air control” and applied it in Iraq, lately wrested from the Turkish Empire. In this scheme, the Royal Air Force (RAF) patrolled the country from a network of bases, bombarding villages and tribes as needed to put down unrest and subversive activities. It was in Iraq that the British first practiced, if never perfected, the technology of bombardment, there that they first attempted to fully theorize the value of airpower as an independent arm of the military. Existing historiography does not explain satisfactorily why Iraq in particular was deemed a suitable place for such practices. Reasons of cost and topography would have applied equally elsewhere; they may have helped sell the idea to the Cabinet but do not explain the initial

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<sup>1</sup> Dexter Filkins, “Tough New Tactics by U. S. Tighten Grip on Iraq Towns,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2003, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esquire, Late Governor-General of Bengal, Second Day: Saturday, February 16, 1788, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London, 1887; Project Gutenberg, 2005), 9: 447–449, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13968/13968-h/13968-h.htm> (accessed December 7, 2005).

formulation of the air control regime.<sup>3</sup> The answer to this question lies, I think, in the realm of cultural history, in the cultural imagination about aerial bombardment and about the region the British knew as “Arabia.”<sup>4</sup>

British imaginings about Arabia were circulated in the main by a community of intelligence agents who ventured to the land of the Bible hoping to find spiritual redemption under cover of patriotic duty.<sup>5</sup> This hope was the product not merely of a reflexive orientalism but of a specific historical moment in which the South African War and the Great War had convinced many Britons that bourgeois Britain had strayed from the path of true glory. Their construction of Arabia as a mystical land impervious to visual observation and so full of medieval and biblical romance that it existed somewhere beyond the pale of worldly and bourgeois “convention” both inspired the air control scheme and sustained its acceptability in the face of criticism of its inhumanity. Their presence on the ground, gathering intelligence that would facilitate accurate bombardment, also convinced some of the regime’s *humanity*. Flying in the face of what James Scott has told us about how modern states see, this regime fetishized local knowledge not as an antidote to but as the foundation of its violent effort to render nomad terrain legible. Scott’s concern with the “*imperialism* of high-modernist, planned social order” is certainly well-placed, but this story is a reminder that imperialism is a political relationship more than a perspective; intimacy does not make it go away.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The existing historiography is primarily concerned with the scheme’s efficacy as a policing technique and an incubus for the fledgling RAF. See David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester, 1990); Elmer B. Scovill, “The RAF and the Desert Frontiers of Iraq, 1919–1930,” *Aerospace Historian*, June 1975, 84–90; Jafna Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of Its Role in Iraq, 1919–32,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 13 (1985): 157–184. The following works examine air control’s darker side: Charles Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness’: Air Control in the Middle East between the Wars,” in Chris Wrigley, ed., *Warfare, Diplomacy and Politics: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* (London, 1986), 142–162; Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (2000; trans., New York, 2001), 42–43; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York, 2003), chap. 7. While European and Arab powers—who also would have felt the need to economize—experimented with air policing, no other regime was as skeletally austere or as dependent on total air substitution as the British regime in the Middle East, which also suggests that something more than economy was at play. On other powers’ use (and lack of use) of air control, see Omissi, *Air Power*, 184–209; Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The Use of Aircraft in Unconventional Warfare, 1918–1988* (London, 1989), 11–12; James S. Corum, “The Myth of Air Control: Reassessing the History,” *Aerospace Power Journal* 14, no. 4 (2000): 69–70; Macneece, Wing Commander, Air Staff, Baghdad, on his visit to the French Army of the Levant, February 8, 1923, AIR 5/269, Public Record Office (PRO); Air Staff, Remarks on Iraq Intelligence Summaries nos. 51–53 of September 19, September 26, October 1, and October 24, 1923, 52469, CO 730/46, PRO; Robert J. Young, “The Strategic Dream: French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919–39,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 (1974): 57–76; Pascal Vennesson, “Institution and Airpower: The Making of the French Air Force,” in John Gooch, ed., *Air Power in Theory and Practice* (London, 1995), 54–55.

<sup>4</sup> British experts stressed the impossibility of ever defining the borders of “Arabia” precisely but used the term generally to refer to the desert and Arab-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire. Anatolia, Egypt, and Yemen were off and on part of this imaginary. I use the word strictly in the cultural sense, to refer to the British imaginary of a land of mirage, myth, and imprecise borders.

<sup>5</sup> On this community, its origins, motivations, methods, and experiences, see Priya Satia, “The Secret Center: Arabia Intelligence in British Culture and Politics, 1900–1932” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn., 1998). This regime, particularly its interest in cultivating local knowledge, was shaped by the very cultural moment that saw the emergence of the critique of universalist rationalism at the heart of Scott’s work.

I am arguing here that violence and culture were more closely and literally allied in imperial rule than has generally been recognized. That Europeans derived power from cultural knowledge about the “Orient” is a commonplace; I want to examine how representations shaped the practical knowledge-gathering projects of intelligence and surveillance in the Middle East. My purpose is not to hold British representations of Arab views up against the Arab reality but to demonstrate that the activities of the modern state are shaped by the cultural imagination.<sup>7</sup> Like Mary Renda’s work on the U.S. occupation of Haiti in the same period, this is a story about how representations mattered in the creation of material structures of power in Iraq, how they *functioned*, how they underwrote a horrific episode of state-sanctioned violence.<sup>8</sup> It stands at an angle to Christopher Bayly’s work on *Empire and Information* in nineteenth-century India, which does not allot the orientalist vision a productive role in the elaboration of state intelligence practices, taking knowledge as something objective and neutral rather than culturally constructed.<sup>9</sup> By attending to cultural conceptions, this story sheds light on the continuities between the violence of imperialism and total war, as urged in the recent work of Mark Mazower, Hew Strachan, Isabel Hull, and others.<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt long ago implicated the British secret agent in the origins of European totalitarianism, although she ultimately acquitted the British Empire itself of the “real” horrors of the twentieth century:

[W]hen the British Intelligence Services (especially after the First World War) began to attract England’s best sons, who preferred serving mysterious forces all over the world to serving the common good of their country, the stage seemed to be set for all possible horrors . . . The happy fact is that . . . cruelty played a lesser role [in the British Empire] between the two World Wars than ever before and a minimum of human rights was always safeguarded.<sup>11</sup>

It is time, I think, to reexamine received wisdom about the relatively benign nature of the British state and to begin to understand how British officials reconciled genuine ethical scruples with the actual violence of imperial policing in the British Middle East.

<sup>7</sup> The actual experiences of Iraqis caught in the web of aerial surveillance have not, to my knowledge, been described at any length and seem a pressing topic for examination by a Middle East historian. This article is concerned with the logic of British justifications for the air control regime, particularly the source of Britons’ confidence in their ability to speak for the Arab, whatever the latter’s expressions of protest or approval.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001).

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. 370.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Mazower, “Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century,” *AHR* 107, no. 4 (October 2002): 1158–1178; Hew Strachan, “Total War in the Twentieth Century,” in Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley, and Wendy Simpson, eds., *Total War and Historical Change: Europe, 1914–1955* (Buckingham, 2001), 264–266; Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2005); Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York, 2005); A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” in Mark Levene, ed., special issue, *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 7–36.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism: Part Two of “The Origins of Totalitarianism”* (1951; repr., New York, 1968), 101.

BRITISH AGENTS BEGAN TO EXPLORE THE INTERIOR of the Ottoman Empire with some intensity at the turn of the century, when rivalry with Germany, nationalist movements within the Ottoman Empire, and the intelligence failures of the South African War combined to recommend more energetic intelligence-gathering in the Middle East. Britain's obligations to the Ottomans under their official alliance meant that military officers on leave, diplomats, gentlemanly scholars, archaeologists, journalists, and other kinds of informal agents outside the pale of the nascent intelligence establishment were the primary sources of intelligence.<sup>12</sup> Once there, these informal agents complained of the great difficulty of gathering intelligence in a proverbially inscrutable land, "peopled mainly by the spirits of the Arabian Nights, where little surprise would be occasioned in . . . seeing a genie floating in a stream of thin vapour out of a magic bottle," as a military attaché spying on the Hejaz Railway put it. It was extraterrestrial, so "uncanny" that the naturalist and agent of the Directorate of Military Operations, Douglas Carruthers, felt "suddenly transplanted to the . . . moon."<sup>13</sup> Cartography was a central feature of the agents' work,<sup>14</sup> but in the apparently featureless, horizonless, protean, and mirage-ridden desert, they often had great difficulty simply determining where they were.<sup>15</sup> They determined to cease "thinking geographically"; whatever the region's actual topographical detail, it remained for them something of a desert idyll, "very much the same everywhere."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Anglo-Ottoman accord of 1901 committed both parties to maintaining the status quo in the Ottoman Empire. This in itself made intelligence more important, as British officials remained puzzled as to what the status quo was. None of this, however, prevented the British from pursuing (secretly) their private arrangements with Gulf potentates—which only stoked Ottoman paranoia about British commitment to the status quo. Hence, the Ottomans banned British travel in the region just when Britons were becoming most desperate to venture there, forcing intelligence into a semi-covert and thus semi-autonomous sphere made up of civilians and the off-the-record activities of various local representatives.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure: To the Great Nafud in Quest of the Oryx* (London, 1935), 68; F. R. Maunsell, "The Hejaz Railway," *Geographical Journal* 32 (1908): 570.

<sup>14</sup> Geography had always been the "material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient" (Edward Said, *Orientalism* [1978; repr., New York, 1979], 216) and was central to intelligence work anywhere, but it acquired a special importance in Ottoman Arabia, then an infamous "white spot" on British maps. Theories of environmental determinism also suggested that agents could learn much about Arabs simply by studying their landscape, in any case the primary factor in a region of "small wars," which were "in the main campaigns against nature" (Col. C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, 3rd ed. [London, 1906], 44). The urgent need to obtain details of the German-backed Baghdad Railway made mapmaking even more central, while agents found in geography a suitably scholarly cover for other kinds of intelligence work in the region. See, for instance, Captain Fraser Hunter to Assistant Surveyor-General, April 6, 1910, 3263, India Office Records (IOR): L/PS/10/259, British Library (BL); Bury to Sir Richmond Ritchie, IO, November 15, 1909, 3216, IOR: L/PS/10/135, BL; Shakespear's correspondence in 5125, IOR: L/PS/10/259, BL; Arthur Wavell, *A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca and a Siege in Sanaa* (Boston, 1913), 181.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Captain Shakespear, February 2, 1910, tour diary 1910, to Cox, March 23, 1910, 44/29805/10, FO 371/1013, PRO; Bell to her family, February 19, 1914, March 5, 1911, and February 17, 1911, in *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, ed. Lady Bell, 2 vols. (London, 1927), 1: 276, 288, 339; Douglas Carruthers, "Journey in North-Western Arabia," *Geographical Journal* 35 (1910): 234, 240; J. G. Lorimer, ed., *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. 2: *Geographical and Statistical* (Calcutta, 1908), 199, 759 n., 767, IOR: L/PS/20/C91/4, BL; Bell, January 23, 1914, in *Diary of a Journey to Hayil*, 20, 11, Papers of Gertrude Bell, 1/1, Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony's College, Oxford University (MEC); Mark Sykes, "Journeys in North Mesopotamia," *Geographical Journal* 30 (1907): 242; G. Wyman Bury [Abdullah Mansur, pseud.], *The Land of Uz* (London, 1911), 246; Captain S. S. Butler, "Baghdad to Damascus via El Jauf, Northern Arabia," February 22, 1909, *Geographical Journal* 33 (1909): 520.

<sup>16</sup> Louisa Jebb, *By Desert Ways to Baghdad* (Boston, 1909), 224–225; David Hogarth, comment on Butler, "Baghdad to Damascus," 533. Meredith Townsend recognized early on that most Englishmen, "filled . . . with the 'idea' of Arabia," tended to exaggerate the region's aridity (*Asia and Europe: Studies*

They also deemed the region's inhabitants so compulsively dishonest that, in the words of Captain Gerard Leachman, a military officer on "special duty" while ostensibly on leave, "one cannot believe a word of anything one hears." Refracted through the strange desert atmosphere and the idiosyncratic use of time, numbers, and distance, truth seemed invariably to fall victim to exaggeration.<sup>17</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of, these practical difficulties, Arabia did seem to these agents to possess qualities that an increasingly decadent and bourgeois Britain had lost: there, the Aden agent G. Wyman Bury wrote, "one may step straight from this modern age of bustle and chicanery into an era of elemental conditions . . . back into the pages of history to mediaeval times."<sup>18</sup> Extending their romanticization of the noble Arab savage to themselves, these agents saw the desert as a haven for individuals who prized "boundless liberty" above all else, whether they had been born there or had fled civilization's relentless smothering of their instincts to be there.<sup>19</sup> The Celtic, Catholic, and frustrated aristocratic affinities that many of them shared informed their sense of alienation from England and attraction to Arabia,

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*Presenting the Conclusions Formed by the Author in a Long Life Devoted to the Subject of the Relations between Asia and Europe*, 2nd ed. [New York, 1904], 161).

<sup>17</sup> G. E. Leachman, quoted in N. N. E. Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia: The Biography of Brevet Lieut.-Colonel G. E. Leachman, C. I. E., D. S. O., of the Royal Sussex Regiment* (London, 1936), 171. See also Callwell, *Small Wars*, 49–50; Aubrey Herbert, *Ben Kndim: A Record of Eastern Travel*, ed. Desmond MacCarthy, 2nd ed. (New York, 1925), 67; Lorimer, Tour Diary no. 1 of 1909, February 6, 1910, 44/8742/10, FO 371/1006, PRO; Crow to Lowther, May 9, 1913, 44/F.11950/13, FO 371/1799, PRO; Bury, *Land of Uz*, 36. "Special duty" agents were usually military officers "run" by the DMO, but as likely affiliated with Cairo or Indian intelligence or the Admiralty. They often traveled under the cover of the Survey of Egypt and the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), an organization devoted to the study of historical sites in the Holy Land but that also worked closely with the intelligence community. See Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine, 1906–1914: A Study of the Antecedents of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration* (London, 1980), 332–333; Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914–1918* (London, 1998), 21, 22; H. V. F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926* (London, 1982), 6–7, 31, 71; Winstone, *Leachman: "OC Desert"—The Life of Lieutenant-Colonel Gerard Leachman, D.S.O.* (London, 1982), 74. Among agents mentioned in this paper, the naturalist Douglas Carruthers, Richard Meinertzhagen from Quetta Staff College, Indian Army officers Norman Bray and Hubert Young, and Captain Stewart F. Newcombe of the Royal Engineers were all on the "special duty" list, and all reappeared in wartime intelligence organizations in the Middle East.

<sup>18</sup> Bury, *Land of Uz*, xxi. See also Bury to Ritchie, November 22, 1909, IOR: L/PS/10/135, BL; Sykes, lecture to the Royal Geographical Society, March 11, 1907, and letter to O'Connor, August 27, 1907, quoted in Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters* (London, 1923), 177, 207; Peter Brent, *Far Arabia: Explorers of the Myth* (London, 1977), 26, 133; Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorised Biography of T. E. Lawrence* (London, 1989), 95; D. G. Hogarth, comment on Carruthers, "Journey in North-Western Arabia," 245; Kathryn Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby* (Cambridge, 1981), 124, 166–169, 178. Aubrey Herbert was unanimously described as a "knight"; Bray titled his biography of Leachman *A Paladin of Arabia*. Lawrence was famously obsessed with medieval warfare; his first steps in the region were taken to research his thesis on the influence of the Crusades on European military architecture. The Romantics had also looked to Eastern philosophy and culture for alternatives to Occidental materialism and mechanism, but unlike these forebears, Edwardians did not so much urge Europe to copy Arabia as seek individual escape into it, combining fulfillment of this wish with intelligence work. Nor, once there, did they recoil, as the Romantics had, from the "real" Orient; they nurtured a need for aesthetic experience so desperate that they did not even see mundane Arabia when they got there, only their prefiguring vision of it. See, for instance, David Fraser, *The Short Cut to India: The Record of a Journey along the Route of the Baghdad Railway* (Edinburgh, 1909), 234. On the Romantics, see Said, *Orientalism*, 100–115.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1915), 5, 118. See also *Dar-ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (London, 1904), 13; Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure*, 32; E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*

their marginality at the same time serving as a badge of authentically eccentric Englishness.<sup>20</sup> At a time when Europe seemed to have run out of “dark places” to conquer and explore, Arabia also ranked first among places that the Royal Geographical Society termed “the Still Unknown,” where they might hope to recover the heroic spirit of the pioneer Victorian explorer.<sup>21</sup> Between the actual informality of intelligence arrangements in the region, the agents’ libertarianism—they felt like “outlaws” in a region beyond “the longest arm of the law”—and their nostalgic hankering after imperial fame, intelligence in Arabia remained outside the compass of the ethic of *discreet service* that had begun to dominate the professional intelligence services. Arabia was to these agents a spy space in its very essence, where professional methodological and ethical standards simply did not apply: “Crossing the Mediterranean . . . one entered a new realm of espionage, a world . . . full of Eastern patience and cunning and subterfuge, but nevertheless a world . . . in which the spy no longer emerged bogey-like as in the West.”<sup>22</sup>

To its practitioners’ delight, intelligence in Arabia seemed to resemble the intelligence world of the emerging genre of spy fiction, whose development it also profoundly influenced.<sup>23</sup> Deeply conscious of working in the region of the Bible and

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(London, 1912), 11; Mark Cocker, *Richard Meinertzhagen: Soldier, Scientist, and Spy* (1989; repr., London, 1990), 127.

<sup>20</sup> Some, including Sykes and George Lloyd, were Roman Catholic converts. Sykes was an aristocrat frustrated by the seemingly inexorable decline of his class; the bastard child Lawrence felt cheated of his own aristocratic patrimony. See Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 166–169, 178. Bell followed in a line of aristocratic women travelers in the desert who explicitly bucked bourgeois Victorian gender stereotypes. The Celtic, or at least Anglo-Irish, origins of many of the agents, including Glubb, Lawrence, Philby, Erskine Childers, and Sir Wilfrid Blunt, were much commented upon. See, for instance, Alec Kirkbride, *A Crackle of Thorns: Experiences in the Middle East* (London, 1956), 62; John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (1916; repr., Oxford, 1993), 24. By 1922, “the English Turk pro the Irish Arabian” was a recognizable type (G. B. Shaw to Lawrence, December 1, 1922, in *Letters to T. E. Lawrence*, ed. A. W. Lawrence [London, 1962], 161–163). Some also posited a common racial background between the ancient clans of Britain and the tribes of the Middle East. See Sir Thomas Holdich, “The Geography of the North-West Frontier,” *Geographical Journal* 17 (1901): 461; Soane, *To Mesopotamia*, 399; Edwyn Bevan, *The Land of the Two Rivers* (London, 1918), 35. See Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 31, 41, on the nineteenth-century roots of this perception.

<sup>21</sup> D. G. Hogarth, “Problems in Exploration I: Western Asia,” *Geographical Journal* 32 (1908): 549–550. See also “New & Projected Exploring Expeditions,” *Times*, January 18, 1909, 10; Wavell, *A Modern Pilgrim*, 105; E. A. Reeves, Map Curator and Instructor, RGS, “Notes and Suggestions on Geographical Surveying and Practical Astronomy Suited to Present Requirements,” *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904): 100; Hugh Robert Mill, “The Present Problems of Geography,” *Geographical Journal* 25 (1905): 7; Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham, N.C., 1994), 93; Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, 2001), 199. The Amazon and Tibet also fascinated Edwardians, but significant progress had been made on mapping Tibet by the time of the 1907 convention with the Russians, a fact that Hogarth marshaled to demonstrate just how unknown Arabia was. Tibet emerged as a utopic archive-state only in the British imagination to the 1930s (Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* [London, 1993], 32). The North and South Poles were also being explored for the first time, but Arabia was the last inhabited area where Europe could still dream of shining the light of civilization and progress. Agents who had traveled in other vast spaces (the veldt, the Sahara, the Gobi, the Mexican plains, etc.) singled out Arabia as the most sublime and mysterious among these. See, for instance, Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure*, 122–123; Sykes, report of journey in northern Mesopotamia, in O’Conor to Grey, June 24, 1906, 44/22155/06, FO 371/152, PRO; Captain A. F. Townshend, *A Military Consul in Turkey: The Experiences and Impressions of a British Representative in Asia Minor* (London, 1910), 61.

<sup>22</sup> Bell, January 16, 1914, Diary of a Journey to Hayyil; Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure*, 10, 22, 42; Ferdinand Tuohy, *The Secret Corps: A Tale of “Intelligence” on All Fronts* (London, 1920), 172.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London, 1975), 111. An instance of real life inspiring fiction: the hero of John Buchan’s *Greenmantle* (1916) was based on Aubrey

the Odyssey, where espionage had always been an integral part of the epic struggle for knowledge of the self, they followed the hero of Kipling's *Kim* (1901) in seeing "no contradiction between being a spy and being a spiritual disciple."<sup>24</sup> In the "infinitely mysterious . . . misty and unreal, incomprehensible . . . unfathomable" desert, faith, if not facts or visual data, seemed a reasonably practical objective.<sup>25</sup> As Edwardian orientalist, these agents were not so much interested in a positivistic, secular project of amassing and arranging facts; theirs was an anti-empiricist, metaphysical epistemology based on notions of a shared past and racial affinities. Indeed, if travel there numbed the senses for lack of "anything to call them into play," it did, as one traveler put it, allow one to "'see, hear, feel, *outside the senses.*'"<sup>26</sup> Many agents had in fact pleaded with Whitehall for the job for precisely this reason, finding in intelligence suitably patriotic cover for an escape from Western science, which had begun to produce an unsettling sense of human insignificance and inexorable cosmic entropy.<sup>27</sup> Gertrude Bell, a traveler and antiquarian informally in the pay of the Admiralty, explained to a sympathetic Iraqi that Europe's scientists "know nothing . . . Their eyes have explored the stars, yet they cannot tell us the meaning of the word infinity."<sup>28</sup> The apparent limitations on empirical intelligence-gathering in Arabia tended to open the door to a breed of explorer-agent willing, like the contemporary philosophical and artistic avant-garde, to experiment with new theories of perception and more "unscientific" ways of knowing.

As a basis of knowledge, faith could at once solve agents' intelligence-gathering difficulties and provide an antidote to their spiritual cravings as Edwardians. To them, Arabia, of all magical, mysterious places, was *the* place for miraculous con-

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Herbert, one of the honorary attaché-spies based at Constantinople. It is well known that in general the British spy novel and British intelligence came of age together in this period. See, for instance, Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (1985; repr., New York, 1986), 34–58.

<sup>24</sup> Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana, Ill., 1993), 87. See also Richards, *The Imperial Archive*, 26. Almost everything in the novel relating to intelligence work in India was a product of Kipling's imagination (Gerald Morgan, "Myth and Reality in the Great Game," *Asian Affairs* 60 [1973]: 197; Michael Silvestri, "The Thrill of 'Simply Dressing Up': The Indian Police, Disguise, and Intelligence Work in Colonial India," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2 [2001]: para. 13, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_colonialism\\_and\\_colonial\\_history/v002/2.2silvestri.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.2silvestri.html) [accessed December 7, 2005]; C. A. Bayly, "'Knowing the Country': Empire and Information in India," *Modern Asian Studies* 27 [1993]: 36), but that *Kim* influenced real intelligence afterward is evident in "Intelligence Methods in Peace Time," 1909, KV 1/4, PRO. Arendt also sees *Kim* as the foundational legend of the British secret agent (*Imperialism*, 97). Incidentally, Kim Philby of the notorious Cambridge Five, who was named after the novel's hero, was the son of Jack Philby, a prominent Arabist agent who eventually fell out with the British government and defected to Najd and Islam.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, 1928, quoted in Rosemary O'Brien, ed., *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913–1914* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2000), 9–10.

<sup>26</sup> Jebb, *By Desert Ways*, 264–265; emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), 134–138; Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth-Century Thought* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 5–6; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 38; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004); Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and Epistemology of Modernism* (New York, 2000). See also "The Mystical Revival," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 20, 1913, 117–118; review of Oliver Lodge, *Man and Universe: A Study of the Influence of the Advance in Scientific Knowledge upon Our Understanding of Christianity*, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 15, 1908, 344; Bevan, *The Land of the Two Rivers*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Gertrude Bell, *Amurath to Amurath* (New York, 1911), 193.

viction: in the words of the honorary attaché and informal spy Mark Sykes, “the desert is of God and in the desert no man may deny Him.” This was the birthplace of the four monotheistic religions, all of which began with prophets who saw visions and heard voices.<sup>29</sup> If orientalism was founded, as Edward Said argues, on a secularization that “loosened, even dissolved, the Biblical framework,” in this particular historical moment, the lingering perception that Arabia was a biblical homeland to which British agents *returned* remained powerful. This notion fundamentally shaped agents’ view of Arabs themselves, who seemed to possess, “alone, even among Asiatics . . . perfection of mental content.”<sup>30</sup> Said tells us that Arabs and Arabia were seen to offer no wisdom at all, but in an era fascinated by occultism, whose ancient ruins were then being dug up by archaeologists in the Middle East, primitivism was *trendy*, however racist.<sup>31</sup> Arab “wisdom” was intuitive rather than intellectual, as beyond scientific check as all things Arabian: “The European thinks, the Oriental only reflects, and if left to himself the idea, turned over and over endlessly . . . is part of the fibre of his mind.” This was as much a product of place as of race: a traveler explained, “In . . . desert countries . . . the essential facts . . . sink into you imperceptibly, until . . . they are . . . woven into the fibres of your nature.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, agents’ distraction from an empirical method of intelligence-gathering also pointed a way forward. Rather than abandon the effort to grasp Arabia’s political and geographical realities, they invented a new intelligence strategy that prioritized knowledge acquired through intuition over sense data and stipulated lengthy immersion as the only effective preparation for this work. By intuition, the agents meant the *acquired* ability to *think like an Arab*, an empathetic mimicry of the “Arab mind,” for “Only by Orientals—or by those whose long sojourn in the East has formed their minds after the Oriental pattern—can the Orient be adequately described.” Agents such as Captain Norman Bray, an Indian Army officer on “special duty,” determined to forgo the expatriate lifestyle and “merge . . . in the Oriental as far as possible, [to] absorb his ideas, *see with his eyes, and hear with his ears*, to the fullest extent possible to one bred in British traditions.”<sup>33</sup> The future powers of T. E. Law-

<sup>29</sup> Sykes, *The Caliph’s Last Heritage*, 57. See also Bell, *Amurath to Amurath*, 193; M. E. Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia: An Account of an Englishwoman’s Eight Years’ Residence amongst the Women of the East* (London, 1909), 130–131; Cocker, *Richard Meinertzhagen*, 189; Lawrence, quoted in Jean M. E. Béraud-Villars, *T. E. Lawrence; or, The Search for the Absolute*, ed. Peter Dawnay (London, 1958), 207; Vyvyan Richards, *Portrait of T. E. Lawrence: The Lawrence of “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom”* (London, 1936), 67–68; Jebb, *By Desert Ways*, 260–263.

<sup>30</sup> Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, 305–306.

<sup>31</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 120–122, 230–231. These travelers did not seek the sensual indulgence that the Orient is generally supposed to have offered Europeans; they sought escape from what they saw as the moral decadence of their *own* society. Cf. Rana Kabbani, *Europe’s Myths of the Orient* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 6. On the links between primitivism and modern occultism, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 232.

<sup>32</sup> Townsend, *Asia and Europe*, 167; Jebb, *By Desert Ways*, 16–17. See also Sykes, *The Caliph’s Last Heritage*, 438.

<sup>33</sup> Frederic Lees, introduction to Philip Baldensperger, *The Immovable East: Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine* (Boston, 1913), vii; N. N. E. Bray, *Shifting Sands* (London, 1934), 14, emphasis added. This argument differs from Kathryn Tidrick’s argument in *Heart-Beguiling Araby* that the British felt endowed, by their intrinsic similarity, with a miraculous insight into Arab affairs. Tidrick’s book does not take into account significant changes in the Edwardian era, when intelligence efforts were stepped up markedly and British agents grew convinced that the seemingly noble Arab and his landscape lied almost compulsively. Intuition became the centerpiece of their epistemology in a new way: if Arabia was



rence, then an archaeologist with ties to the intelligence community, were later traced to this “immersion in [the Arabs], by sympathetic projection.”<sup>34</sup>

The intuitive ability to discern truth—about Arabia’s geography as much as its people—from the dross of rumor and gossip was prized among Arabia agents both before and during the war.<sup>35</sup> What made Arabia experts *expert* was their ability to see, like Arabs, beyond surface deceptions to the buried, deeper truth, to discern the real from the unreal, the mirage, the lie. Knowing Arabia was a matter of *genius*. Thus, the gifted few seemed, to contemporaries, as preternaturally omniscient and inscrutable as the objects of their scrutiny.<sup>36</sup> As a result, at the outbreak of war, they exercised a remarkable influence over the two campaigns fought in the region. Some advised Whitehall, others the military intelligence establishments at Cairo and Basra (and later Jerusalem and Baghdad). Many wound up as political officers charged with gathering intelligence and governing the “liberated” provinces of British-occupied Iraq. Several circulated continually between all these establishments. Official complaints that in Arabia “little can be trusted that is seen” and that “Western” intel-

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unintelligible, a rational British mind could have no insight into its workings, regardless of cultural familiarity. Instead, the aspiring agent would have to learn to think irrationally, like an Oriental.

<sup>34</sup> Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart, “T. E. Lawrence”: *In Arabia and After* (London, 1934), 23–24. See also Hogarth, quoted in Sari Nasir, *The Arabs and the English* (London, 1976), 125; John Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence* (Boston, 1976), 92. Archaeology was not merely “cover” for secret service work; nor was it entirely innocent. Lawrence worked for David Hogarth, who served on the PEF and had close social and professional ties to the intelligence network. Archaeology was also a prestige issue impinging on geopolitical considerations. Lawrence and Leonard Woolley definitely were involved in a military intelligence mission in Sinai in 1913 that led to further work with Stewart Newcombe on the Baghdad Railway. These prewar experiences laid the foundation for the induction of Hogarth, Lawrence, and Woolley into wartime intelligence.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Lorimer, Tour Journal no. 1 of 1910, Voyage to Salman Pak, February 11, 1910, 44/11909/10, FO 371/1008, PRO; Knox, report on the outlook in Nejd, September 26, 1906, 44/40123/06, FO 371/156, PRO; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2: iii, 1352; Shakespear, Notes on tour via as-Safa, al-Batin and back to Kuwait, to Cox, April 4, 1910, 44/29805/10, FO 371/1013, PRO; Sykes, notes on Kurdistan, submitted to Grey, August 14, 1907, 44/28053/07, FO 371/354, PRO; Crow to Lowther, May 9, 1913, and May 31, 1913, 44/F.11950/13, FO 371/1799, PRO; G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum* (1900), quoted in David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914–1922* (New York, 1989), 90; Carruthers, *Arabian Adventure*, 168; John Presland [Gladys Skelton, pseud.], *Deedes Bey: A Study of Sir Wyndham Deedes, 1883–1923* (London, 1942), 168; Obituary for Parker, *Times*, January 3, 1936, quoted in H. V. F. Winstone, *The Diaries of Parker Pasha: War in the Desert, 1914–18—Told from the Secret Diaries of Colonel Alfred Chevallier Parker, Nephew of Lord Kitchener, Governor of Sinai, and Military Intelligence Chief in the Arab Revolt* (London, 1983), 199; J. W. A. Young, “A Little to the East,” 141, memoir, ca. 1940s, Papers of J. W. A. Young, MEC; A fellow officer, obituary for Leachman, *Daily Telegraph*, August 21, 1920.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Brigadier-General G. S. Clive, confidential report on Meinertzhagen, 1918, quoted in Michael Occleshaw, *Armour against Fate: British Military Intelligence in the First World War* (Columbus, Ohio, 1989), 97; *Times*, 1967, quoted in Cocker, *Richard Meinertzhagen*, 104; [Hirtzel?], minute on FO to IO, January 20, 1917, IOR L/PS/10/576, BL; Lawrence to Intrusive, April 8, 1916, PNA/16/2, FO 882/XV, Arab Bureau Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University (hereafter FO 882); Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia*, 362; Presland, *Deedes Bey*, 190–191, 238–239; H. St. John B. Philby, *Arabian Days: An Autobiography* (London, 1948), 93, 113; chap. 5 in *Mesopotamiae*, MS, [1930s], Papers of H. St. John B. Philby, MEC; Compton Mackenzie, *Gallipoli Memories* (London, 1929), 99; Lawrence to his family, December 14, 1917, in *The Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence and His Brothers* (Oxford, 1954), 344; Bertram Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia* (London, 1931), 26; Sir Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (New York, 1937), 204; Robert Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs* (London, 1927), 24; Major-General L. C. Dunsterville, *Stalky’s Reminiscences* (London, 1928), 280; Raymond Savage, *Allenby of Armageddon: A Record of the Career and Campaigns of Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby* (Indianapolis, 1926), 276, 309.

ligence tactics were consequently useless were ubiquitous.<sup>37</sup> Intuition and immersion were enshrined as an official intelligence strategy for the Middle East. “Book knowledge” mattered little, for as Bray, then a political officer, put it, “we ‘sensed’ the essence of a matter.”<sup>38</sup> It was the agent’s *word* that gave information the status of “intelligence” in the Middle Eastern theaters: as head of intelligence in Palestine, Richard Meinertzhagen was “delighted to find that my reports were not only read but acted on,” for in East Africa he had been unable to impress upon his commanders that “when I stated information about the enemy as a fact it was indeed a fact” and not merely gossip.<sup>39</sup> The visions of these oracular agents would profoundly shape war tactics and the postwar administration of the British mandatory regimes in Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine.

DEMOBILIZATION REMAINED A DISTANT DREAM for British troops charged with confronting the series of anticolonial rebellions that erupted across the empire in 1919–1921. Spurred by the postwar rhetoric of self-determination, Bolshevik example and encouragement, and expectations of political rewards for wartime cooperation and sacrifices, nationalists in Egypt, India, Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somaliland, and elsewhere organized mass agitations against British rule, while Persia, Syria, Turkey, and the imploding Russian Empire remained volatile. As the situation grew dire in Iraq, where a population writhing under protracted military occupation mounted a violent insurgency, British officials searched desperately for a way to avert evacu-

<sup>37</sup> Here are but a few of the countless examples: Sykes, appreciations of Arabian Reports no. 4, June 6, 1916, and no. 21A, April 4, 1916, 44/152059/16, FO 371/2779, PRO; Clayton to DMI, March 27, 1917, HRG/17/21, FO 882/VI; Lawrence to C. E. Wilson, December 6, 1916, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, ed. David Garnett (London, 1938), 211; Philby, telegram to Political Baghdad, February 4, 1918, IR/18/1, FO 882/VIII; Bray to Clayton, October 18, 1916, HRG/16/54, FO 882/V; Parker, report, October 7, 1916, 44/219304/42233/16, FO 371/2776, PRO; [Hogarth?], Admiralty Intelligence, Arabian Report, February 1916, IOR L/PS/10/586, BL; Joyce to Wilson, March 24, 1917, FO 686/6/Part 1, PRO; Storrs, diary of visit to Jeddah, September 27, 1916, 44/205732/16, FO 371/2782, PRO; Knox to Foreign Department, Simla, September 30, 1914, 44/69321 F. 61439/14, FO 371/2144, PRO, and November 12, 1914, and November 28, 1914, W.44/1024/15, FO 371/2478, PRO; Captain W. Leith-Ross, “Secret Service or Intelligence, Sub-Section (B), GHQ,” n.d., 8; “The Tactical Side of I(a),” 12; “The Strategic Side of I(a),” n.d., 18; “Character and Qualifications of Intelligence Personnel,” n.d., 8; “Report on Surveys, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force,” n.d., 1–3; “The Physical and Climatic Difficulties of the Mesopotamian Theatre of War,” August 14, 1916, 1; and Appendix 4 of “Notes on the special topographical features and information peculiar to Mesopotamia required on a military map,” 21–22, all in Leith-Ross Papers, National Army Museum; fforde, September 26, 1917, IND/17/6, FO 882/XII; Newcombe to Wilson, April 3, 1917, FO 686/6/Part 2, PRO. Richard Popplewell accepts uncritically the complaints about Arabian inscrutability (“British Intelligence in Mesopotamia, 1914–1916,” *Intelligence and National Security* 5 [1990]: 152); Toby Dodge points to cost and local antipathy to explain why the colonial project of amassing empirical data to create a sense of order did not occur in mandatory Iraq (*Inventing Iraq*, 73–75).

<sup>38</sup> Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia*, 190. See also “NOTES on the INTELLIGENCE COURSE held in BAGHDAD in October 1918,” n.d., Leith-Ross Papers; Lawrence, “Twenty-seven Articles,” *Arab Bulletin* 60 (August 20, 1917): 347–353, FO 882; Lawrence, Report on intelligence at IEF “D,” Mesopotamia, May 1916, in J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, Appendix 3, 949–952; Tuohy, *The Secret Corps*, 172–173; Clayton, reply to Major Hugh Pearson, March 2, 1917, HRG/17/16, FO 882/VI. There is not space here for the complicated gender story that could be told about this epistemology: The agents were partly fascinated with the desert as a space for manly men, but Gertrude Bell and reliance on what might be termed “womanly” intuition fit comfortably in this culture. Bell, as mentioned above, followed in a line of aristocratic women desert travelers, while Lawrence’s vague sexuality does not seem to have detracted from his imperial heroic masculinity. See biographies cited throughout and Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary, 1899–1926* (Edinburgh, 1960), 127.

ation.<sup>40</sup> Earlier imaginings about the uses of airpower had focused on its general suitability for tribal areas—and in fact it was used to put down unrest all over the Eastern Empire in 1919—but the irresistible idea, cultivated over the previous two decades, that Arabia was a place almost destined for aerial surveillance convinced Whitehall to devise an air control scheme *especially* for Iraq.<sup>41</sup>

Arabist intelligence agents were among the most fervent proponents of airpower in general and the air control scheme in particular. Lawrence dated both his interest in joining the service and his conviction that “aircraft could rule the desert” to the war.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the Middle Eastern campaigns—from the Arabian peninsula north beyond Syria and from the Gulf north beyond Baghdad—had been strangely mobile and creative affairs in a war generally known for the Sisyphean struggles of soldiers and the torpidity of generals; among the factors that most distinguished them was their innovative use of the air arm. A Cabinet Paper of 1921 pronounced,

Great as was the development of air power in the war on the western front, it was mainly concerned with aerial action against enemy aircraft and co-operation with other arms in actions in which land or sea forces were the predominating partner. In more distant theatres, however, such as Palestine, Mesopotamia and East Africa the war has proved that the air has capabilities of its own.<sup>43</sup>

Airpower, like the innovative deceptions and irregular warfare it supported, had been used to turn Arabia’s mysteriousness and medieval and mystical associations

<sup>40</sup> The standard contemporary account of the Iraqi rebellion is Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia* (London, 1922). This fairly large conventional war lasted several months and involved much of the country, including Kurdistan. Roughly a thousand British and Indian troops were killed, and another thousand were wounded. Roughly ten thousand Iraqis were killed.

<sup>41</sup> In 1919, airpower was used to put down unrest in Egypt, Punjab, Somaliland, Afghanistan, and the North-West Frontier (see Omissi, *Air Power*, 11; Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 42–43). It was also used against the Red Army in South Russia. These were “spasmodic, almost casual affairs”; it was in Iraq that British military history was transformed (John Laffin, *Swifter Than Eagles: The Biography of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Maitland Salmond* [Edinburgh, 1964], 192). On prewar imaginings of the uses of airpower, see Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859–1917* (Manchester, 1992), and Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908–1918* (New Haven, Conn., 1994). The war sections of these books focus on the Western Front.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence to Herbert Baker, quoted in Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 320; Major C. S. Jarvis, *Arab Command: The Biography of Lieutenant-Colonel F. G. Peake Pasha, C. M. G., C. B. E.* (London, 1946), 83.

<sup>43</sup> Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force and the Application of That Power to Hold and Police Mesopotamia,” March 1920, AIR 1/426/15/260/3, PRO. Standard histories of the war in the air generally omit altogether the lessons of the Middle Eastern theaters. See, for instance, Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power: British Policy in the First World War* (London, 1986); John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* (Washington, D.C., 1993). Contemporaries and participants did note the innovative use of airpower. See, for instance, A. F. Wavell, *Allenby: Soldier and Statesman* (London, 1944), 195; T. E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926; repr., New York, 1991), 615; Edmund Candler, *The Long Road to Baghdad*, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), 2: 80; E. W. C., review of Brig.-Gen. F. J. Moberly, comp., *History of the Great War, Based on Official Documents: The Campaign in Mesopotamia*, *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 11 (1924): 96; Squadron Commander R. Gordon, report, n.d., attached to SNO Nunn to C-in-C East Indies, December 10, 1915, AIR 1/648/17/122/386, PRO. Existing historiography acknowledges the campaigns’ general instructiveness to later military experts, but is mainly silent as to the consequences and sources of this ingenuity. See, for instance, Dov Gavish, “Wadi fari’a—The ‘Valley of Death’ in the Great War,” *Over the Front: Journal of the League of World War I Aviation Historians* 15 (2000): 360–366; Yigal Sheffy, “Institutionalized Deception and Perception Reinforcement: Allenby’s Campaigns in Palestine,” *Intelligence and National Security* 5 (1990): 173–236.

into an opportunity to restore vitality and individualism to modern warfare.<sup>44</sup> The agents were largely responsible for this intense reliance on the air arm, which also seemed to offer a means of overcoming the information problems posed by Arabia—at least by their idea of it. From the outset, they pined, “Oh for some aeroplanes. If there was a country in the whole world eminently suited to these machines this one is: Flat flat as your hand.”<sup>45</sup> Airpower would turn the desert’s apparent lack of cover and landmarks to the intruder’s advantage, making it impossible for an enemy to move without discovery. Pilots could communicate with tribes and officers marooned in the desert, restoring their bearings and spreading news like *dei ex machina*. They could discreetly reconnoiter places otherwise forbidden to Europeans.<sup>46</sup> Annihilating the distances that otherwise kept nomadic tribes beyond the reach of any state’s scrutiny, aircraft also possessed “enormous political possibilities,”<sup>47</sup> quickly explored in wartime Iraq, where it sometimes happened that the tribes the British liberated “[got] out of hand and require[d] a lesson.” In such an

<sup>44</sup> On the use of airpower in deception and irregular warfare, see Sykes, appreciation of Arabian Report no. 27 of January 24, 1917, January 25, 1917, 44/1256/17, FO 371/3044, PRO; Lt.-Col. The Hon. R. M. P. Preston, *The Desert Mounted Corps: An Account of the Cavalry Operations in Palestine and Syria, 1917–1918* (Boston, 1922), 5–6; Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 615; Brian Gardner, *Allenby* (London, 1965), 195–196; Tennant, OC 30, RFC, GHQ, IEF D, to GOC, Middle East Brigade, RFC Egypt, December 30, 1916, AIR 2/940, PRO; Major Pearson, “Military Situation in Northern Hejaz,” to Sir R. Wingate, end of February 1917, HRG/17/15, FO 882/VI; Sheffy, “Institutionalized Deception,” 191, 214. On the opportunity they offered for individualistic warfare, see Kirkbride to Liddell Hart and Hubert Young, quoted in Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 140, 239; T. E. Lawrence, “The Evolution of a Revolt,” *Army Quarterly*, October 1920, reprinted in T. E. Lawrence, *Oriental Assembly*, ed. A. W. Lawrence (London, 1939), 128–131; Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 194, 340. On Lawrence’s hope that the Arab revolt would offer him a chance to live out his medievalist dreams, see Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 178, 181; Albert Hourani, “The Myth of T. E. Lawrence,” in Wm. Roger Louis, ed., *Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London, 1995), 23; Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 37, 192–193. Medieval texts also informed experience on the Western Front (Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* [Oxford, 1975], 135–144, 154), but here, through agents such as Lawrence, they also shaped the running of the campaigns.

<sup>45</sup> Dickson to Gwenlian Greene, February 7, 1915, 1st booklet, Papers of H. R. P. Dickson, MEC; General, Force “D,” telegram to WO, February 5, 1916, Basrah, AIR 1/140/15/40/306, PRO. Despite the growing demand for airpower in Mesopotamia, airplanes did not arrive there until well into 1915, and then only a few and in poor condition, without repairmen, photographic equipment, spare parts, sufficient pilots, or sufficient knowledge about flying in “tropical” climates. In August 1915, the first two modern machines arrived, the germ of Squadron 30. Only after the Kut debacle and transfer of the command to the War Office did new planes and the latest photographic equipment arrive. Near the end of 1916, the RFC in Mesopotamia was made part of the new Middle East Brigade, which included units in Egypt, Salonika, East Africa, and, later, Palestine.

<sup>46</sup> On these advantages, see, for instance, Lt.-Col. J. E. Tennant, *In the Clouds above Baghdad, Being the Records of an Air Commander* (London, 1920), 35, 38–39, 60–61, 141; Parker, situation report, September 10, 1916, in *The Diaries of Parker Pasha*, 123; Meinertzhagen, October 6, 1927, Rafa, in *Army Diary*, 221; Tennant, GHQ, IEF D, Resume of operations carried out by Squadron no. 30, RFC, March 12–15, 1917, March 30, 1917, AIR 2/940, PRO; Tennant to GOC, Middle East Brigade, December 30, 1916; Note ultimately embodied in Egyptforce, telegram to Wingate, November 14, 1916, WO 158/626, PRO; Lawrence, report, to GOC, Egypt and DMI, November 17, 1916, Cairo, in Arabian Report no. 18, 44/201201/16, FO 371/2781, PRO; [illegible] to Sir W. Robertson, March 19, 1917, HRG/17/19, FO 882/VI. Of considerable importance in the RFC contribution to mapping was the development of aerial photography, which advanced more in Mesopotamia than on any other front, thanks largely to the efforts of agents such as Lawrence and Newcombe. See J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 189, 198 n. 77, 258, 276; Lt.-Col. W. F. Stirling, *Safety Last* (London, 1953), 67; Tennant, *In the Clouds*, 145, 166–167; RAF, Mesopotamia, Preface of “Notes on Aerial Photography, Part II: The Interpretation of Aeroplane Photographs in Mesopotamia,” 1918, AIR 10/1001, PRO; Lt.-Col. GSI, GHQ IEF D, Circular Memo, December 5, 1916, AIR 2/940, PRO.

<sup>47</sup> Brigadier-General Salmond, commanding Middle East Brigade, RFC, HQ, Egypt, to CGS, GHQ EEF, November 12, 1916, WO 158/626, PRO.

instance, it was found, “an aerial raid with bombs and machine guns often has an overwhelming and sometimes an instantaneous effect in inducing submission.”<sup>48</sup> Such experiments revealed to the Cabinet the uses of aircraft in the “attack and dispersal of considerable bodies of ground troops.”<sup>49</sup>

Winston Churchill, the postwar secretary of war and air, had long been intimate with the community of Arabist agents, through common social networks and a shared sensibility besides wartime contact and close cooperation at the Peace Conference. He and the RAF both wagered that airpower might be used creatively to maintain order in the Iraqi mandate after the war. Lawrence, then a fellow at Oxford, assisted in their efforts to devise such a scheme from 1920, as did Iraq’s civil commissioner and head of political intelligence, Arnold Wilson. In 1921, as colonial secretary, Churchill inducted Lawrence and his fellow agents Reader Bullard, Hubert Young, and Richard Meinertzhagen into the new Middle East Department, partly for the aura of legitimacy that they would bring to its work. With these unconventional recruits, wrote Major C. S. Jarvis, the governor of Sinai, the department acquired a unique creative capacity, for an intuitive expert such as Lawrence could “grasp a situation with a clarity . . . which is not a marked characteristic of the average Whitehall official.”<sup>50</sup> These various experts deemed Mesopotamia *peculiarly* suitable for air operations, better than Europe, for aesthetic as much as topographical reasons: its presumed flatness promised many landing grounds, little cover to insurgents, and the possibility of “radiating” British power throughout the country from a handful of fittingly Spartan bases, while the reality of its varied and protean topography, when acknowledged, was held to offer ideal training for the RAF, exposing it to every sort of terrain—mountains in Kurdistan, marshes in the south, riverain territory in between, and so forth. Air action was deemed *inappropriate* for police action in the

<sup>48</sup> Leith-Ross, “Tactical Side of I(a),” 8–9. See also Tennant, *In the Clouds*, 163. This contrasted sharply to uses of airpower in Europe. See Squadron Leader L. G. S. Payne, Lecture, “The Use of Aircraft in Connection with Espionage,” November 7, 1924, RAF Staff College, AIR 1/2399/280/1, PRO.

<sup>49</sup> Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force.” So too did incidents such as the attack on retreating Turkish armies in the “aerial trap” at Wadi Fari’a in September 1918, which spearheaded the fall of Damascus. See Gavish, “Wadi Fari’a,” 362–365; Salmond, HQ, RAF, ME to General, n.d. (36 hours after the battle), AIR 1/725/115/1, PRO.

<sup>50</sup> Jarvis, *Arab Command*, 83. Meinertzhagen was also an old friend of Trenchard and the air secretary, Frederick Guest. Lawrence later claimed, “As soon as I was able to have my own way in the Middle East I approached Trenchard on this point, converted Winston easily, tricked the Cabinet into approving” (to Liddell Hart, 1933, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, 323). While, as Garnett notes, this rather exaggerates Lawrence’s role, it was partly out of gratitude that Trenchard later helped Lawrence secure a place in the ranks, where he remained an influential presence until his death in 1935. According to Meinertzhagen, by the end of 1921, Churchill’s attitude toward Lawrence amounted to “hero-worship” (December 24, 1921, in *Middle East Diary, 1917–1956* [London, 1959], 33; on the questionable authenticity of his diary entries on Lawrence, see, among others, J. N. Lockman, *Meinertzhagen’s Diary Ruse: False Entries on T. E. Lawrence* [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1995]). Churchill’s thinking was certainly also influenced by his cousin Frederick Sykes, chief of Air Staff until 1919, who had early on urged the creation of an “Imperial” air force. Austerity had intervened then, and the Cabinet had dumped the proposal (along with Sykes—with Churchill’s approval), while the RFC struggled to be born as the RAF. On this struggle, see, for instance, John Ferris, *The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919–26* (London, 1989).

densely populated urban environments of Britain, Ireland, and even Palestine.<sup>51</sup> Lawrence insisted, “The system is *not* capable of universal application.”<sup>52</sup>

The agents perceived a basic congruence between the liberty of action of the aircraft and the desert warrior, both operating in empty, unmapped, magical spaces. Lawrence, who had searched in “Bedouin warfare” for an alternative to the anonymous mass slaughter of the Western Front, prophesied, “What the Arabs did yesterday the Air Forces may do to-morrow. And in the same way—yet more swiftly.” Both could move beyond mere concentration of force and replace it with “an intangibly ubiquitous distribution of force—pressing everywhere yet assailable nowhere.”<sup>53</sup> He joined its ranks in 1922 partly because it also promised the kind of literary inspiration that Arabia had given him.<sup>54</sup> His views were echoed by other agents<sup>55</sup> and in the RAF. “There appears to be a sort of natural fellow-feeling between these nomad arabs and the Air Force,” remarked Robert Brooke-Popham, the RAF’s director of research. “Perhaps both feel that they are at times in conflict with

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, Memorandum on the scheme for the employment of the forces of the crown in Mesopotamia, n.d., AIR 20/526, PRO; CAS, Scheme for the Control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force, March[?] 12, 1921, AIR 5/476, PRO; Salmond to Air Ministry, May 22, 1923, AIR 1/2132/207/136/2, PRO; Air Marshal Sir J. M. Salmond, Report on Command from 1 October 1922 to 7 April 1924, n.d. [ca. April 1924], AIR 23/542, PRO; John Glubb, *War in the Desert: An R. A. F. Frontier Campaign* (London, 1960), 69; Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard* (New York, 1962), 371–372; A. T. Wilson, memo on RAF Scheme, to IO, [early 1921], quoted in Marlowe, *Late Victorian*, 201; A. T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917–1920: A Clash of Loyalties—A Personal and Historical Record* (London, 1931), 238–239; A. T. Wilson, memo, February 16, 1921, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 4: 1916–1922: *The Stricken World* (Boston, 1975), 532; Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force and the Application of That Power to Hold and Police Mesopotamia”; Sir A. Haldane, GOC-in-C, Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, report on RAF work in Mesopotamia, to WO, November 25, 1920, Cabinet Paper, February 1921, AIR 5/1253, PRO; “Notes on the value of the air route between Cairo and Baghdad for strategic and other purposes,” n.d., AIR 9/14, PRO; Edmonds, November 22, 1924, in *Diary 1915 to 1924*, Papers of Cecil J. Edmonds, MEC; Churchill, memo, May 1, 1920, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill*, 4: 481; Churchill, Cabinet Memorandum, “Policy and Finance in Mesopotamia, 1922–23,” August 4, 1921, in *Churchill, Companion, Part 3: Documents April 1921—November 1922*, ed. Martin Gilbert (London, 1977), 1576–1581; Churchill to Trenchard, February 29, 1920, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill*, 4: 217.

<sup>52</sup> Lawrence to Liddell Hart, 1933, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, 323; emphasis in original.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Liddell Hart, “T. E. Lawrence,” 438. See also Lawrence, “Twenty-seven Articles”; Lawrence, “Evolution of a Revolt,” 107, 112–113, 116, 122; Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 192, 196; Glubb to Adviser to Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, January 15, 1929, regarding self-defence by Iraq tribes, AIR 2/155, PRO. Aircraft were used as literal guerrillas when the RFC attempted to replicate Lawrence’s train-wrecking exploits on the Baghdad Railway in 1917. On Lawrence’s and other agents’ hope that Bedouin warfare offered a way out of trench warfare, see Lawrence to Graves, ca. 1927, in Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs*, 425; Lawrence, 1933, and Lawrence to Graves, quoted in Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 331, 404; Liddell Hart, “T. E. Lawrence,” 414–415; Lawrence to M. R. Lawrence, February 15, 1922, quoted in *Churchill*, 4/3: 1775–1776; Malcolm Brown, “The Lawrence of *Secret Despatches from Arabia*,” in T. E. Lawrence, *Secret Despatches from Arabia: And Other Writings*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London, 1991), 21; Bray, Report on situation in the Hejaz, November 8, 1916, in Arabian Report no. 18, n.d., 44/201201/16, FO 371/2781, PRO; Bray, report on situation, October 18, 1916, quoted in J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 321; Major Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab* (London, 1933), 162; Storrs, ca. December 1916, quoted in J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 342; Intelligence report, December 28, 1916, FO 686/6/Part 1, PRO; Presland, *Deedes Bey*, 179. Lawrence’s theory of guerrilla warfare appeared in “Evolution of a Revolt,” *Army Quarterly*, October 1920, and *The Seven Pillars*, originally issued in 1922 and then revised in 1926 (188–196). It is used today in American military training, particularly for special forces and counterinsurgency operations. See Ryan Dille, “Lessons from Lawrence of Arabia,” *BBC News Online Magazine*, April 9, 2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/3605261.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3605261.stm) (accessed December 7, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> See Lawrence to Trenchard, January 5, 1922, quoted in Philip Knightley and Colin Simpson, *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia* (London, 1969), 166; Boyle, *Trenchard*, 515. In 1927–1928, he wrote *The Mint* (1955).

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Philby, chap. 7 in *Mesopotage*; Bell, quoted in Laffin, *Swifter Than Eagles*, 176.

the vast elemental forces of nature.”<sup>56</sup> The “desert with all its mysterious fascination” had “an unreal atmospheric quality comparable with the sky. Perhaps,” pondered a wing-commander, “this is why people call it ‘The Blue.’”<sup>57</sup>

Air control, like irregular warfare, was designed to work in a region believed to systematically exaggerate information: where there was one plane, Arabs would spread news of dozens; a few casualties would instill fear of hundreds. Iraq’s lack of natural borders would enable aircraft to use disinformation as a practical strategy.<sup>58</sup> The chief of Air Staff, Hugh Trenchard, envisioned a single imperial air force dispatched like a navy, in fleets, with Baghdad the “pivot” of an imperial air route from England to Cairo to Karachi to Singapore, along which reinforcements could be moved economically between theaters. The “moral effect” of air control upon subversives would derive partly from “this ocular demonstration of the linking up of the British garrisons in their midst with forces of unknown strength outside their ken.”<sup>59</sup> Power would lie offstage, just as it did when irregulars gestured at an “unknown quantity” of supporters in the desert fastness.<sup>60</sup> The logistics of the interwar strategic doctrine of maximum projection of and minimum actual use of force depended on a particular conception of the kind of space the new Arabian empire was.<sup>61</sup>

These spatial conceptions were of special consequence in the shadow of Whitehall’s conspiracy-theory explanations of the Iraqi insurrection. Having colonized the administrative bureaucracy well beyond the Middle East Department, former agents

<sup>56</sup> Robert Brooke-Popham, “Aeroplanes in Tropical Countries,” lecture, in Proceedings of Meeting of the Royal Aeronautical Society on October 6, 1921, *Aeronautical Journal* 25 (March 1, 1922), Brooke-Popham Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College, London (LHCMA). He reiterated this thought after serving as air officer commanding Iraq from 1928 to 1930 and as high commissioner and commander-in-chief in 1929. See Notes for a lecture at Downside on February 7, 1932, Brooke-Popham Papers, File 2/3. See also Sir Arthur Harris, *Bomber Offensive* (London, 1947), 54; Phillip S. Meilinger, “Trenchard and ‘Morale Bombing’: The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine before World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 60 (1996): 243–270.

<sup>57</sup> Wing-Commander R. M. Hill, lecture at Royal Aeronautical Society, quoted in F. V. Monk and H. T. Winter, *The Royal Air Force* (London, 1938), 47.

<sup>58</sup> Some disparaged this tactic as “bluff”—see “Old notes on ‘substitution’ (dictated as a basis for a talk to the Parliamentary Army and Air Committees on the 21st June, 1932),” AIR 9/12, PRO—to which its defenders replied that “bluff” was proof of willingness to take risks, use new technology, and rely on “racial superiority.” On irregular warfare’s theoretical dependence on desert exaggeration, see Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 137; Pierce Joyce, “Notes on Arab Tactics,” ca. February 1917, Papers of Lt.-Col. Pierce Charles Joyce, LHCMA.

<sup>59</sup> “Notes on the value of the air route”; CAS, Scheme for the Control of Mesopotamia. See also Omissi, *Air Power*, 135–136; Deputy Chief of the Air Staff to GOC, RAF, ME, Cairo, April 22, 1919, and RAF, Cairo to Salmond, April 10, 1919, AIR 1/21/15/1/102, PRO; *An Amplification of a Report Previously Rendered by Col. P. R. Chambers in Nov. 1924* (Simla, 1926), IOR: L/MIL/17/15/59, BL; Minutes of inter-departmental conference on the Mesopotamian railways at FO on January 11, 1919, AIR 20/516, PRO; Shuckburgh, Note prepared by Middle East Department, CO, by instruction of the Cabinet Committee on Iraq, November 12, 1922 (printed December 1922), CO 730/34, PRO; A. T. Wilson, telegram to HC Cairo, December 22, 1918, MES/18/6, FO 882/XIII; [T. E. Lawrence], “The Changing East,” *Round Table*, September 1920, in Lawrence, *Oriental Assembly*, 88; Churchill to Hankey, April 13, 1921, in *Churchill*, 4/3: 1438; Salmond to Brooke-Popham, February 13, 1930, AIR 2/830, PRO. See Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917–1919* (London, 1999), 135–137, on the role of the imperial air route in British strategy.

<sup>60</sup> Lawrence to Clayton, August 27, 1917, Akaba, in Lawrence, *T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters*, ed. Malcolm Brown (New York, 1992), 120.

<sup>61</sup> On interwar strategic doctrine, see, for instance, Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919–39* (London, 1986). “Control without occupation,” enabled by new technologies such as aircraft, wireless, and armored cars, became a critical part of this strategy.

were largely the authors of these theories.<sup>62</sup> Blinded by long confidence in Arab anglophilia and in their own special empathy with Arabs, they were unable to conceive the unrest as a genuine protest against British military occupation. Taking their intuitive epistemology to its logical conclusion, they instead divined connections between the various unrests across the Eastern Empire and traced them to a cleverly hidden hand manipulating them from the outside.<sup>63</sup> Air control was designed for a population conceived of as congenitally insurgent, an always incipient guerrilla army lacking any agency of its own but available for exploitation by an external agent. Air control would at once raise the apparatus of imperial rule out of reach of these “stubborn races” and create a surveillance regime capable of coping with nomad existence and porous desert borders: “The ‘long arm’ of the new weapon renders it ubiquitous . . . [and] *makes it practicable to keep a whole country under more or less constant surveillance.*”<sup>64</sup> Through air control, the agents hoped to realize in a new

<sup>62</sup> A few illustrative examples: the political officer Norman Bray served on “special duty” at the India Office. Kinahan Cornwallis of the wartime Arab Bureau joined the Foreign Office, then served as adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. The political officer Capt. Geoffrey Stephenson joined the India Office to liaise with the Iraqi administration. William Ormsby-Gore of the Arab Bureau and the Political Service in Palestine joined the Colonial Office. Major Vivian of the Indian CID and intelligence in Palestine headed intelligence at GHQ Constantinople in 1919 and then dealt with War Office proposals for intelligence in the Middle East. The wartime agent Robert Graves (uncle of the poet of the same name) was at the War Office before rejoining wartime colleague Wyndham Deedes (military attaché) in Constantinople. Deedes was later chief secretary in Palestine. Harold Dickson was a political officer in Iraq, then a political agent in Bahrein, then consulted at the Colonial Office, and later served in Bushire and Kuwait. In 1919, the political officer Jack Philby spent much time working with the India and Foreign offices and then joined the Iraq administration, ending as chief British representative at Amman. Wartime agent George Lloyd served as governor of Bombay and then high commissioner in Egypt. Many former Arab Bureau affiliates also sat on or supplied information to the Interdepartmental Committee on the Eastern Unrest (IDCEU).

<sup>63</sup> Today historians generally agree that the rebellion was an expression of protest against the enduring occupation and a crushing tax regime. See, for instance, Omissi, *Air Power*, 22. British conspiracy theories cast the ultimate villain variously as the Bolsheviks, Germans, the French, Standard Oil, Indian nationalists, and so on. A few exemplary theories emanating from Whitehall (leaving aside those emerging from the military and local intelligence establishments): C. C. Garbett, minute re: Bray’s appointment, August 14, 1920, IOR: L/PS/10/866 Part 2, BL; Stephenson to Wilson, August 5, 1920, Sir A. T. Wilson Papers, Add. MSS 52456A, BL; Montagu, note on the causes of the outbreak in Mesopotamia, n.d. [ca. August 25, 1920], E10440, FO 371/5229, PRO; Bray, “Memorandum on Events in Asia,” n.d. [May 1920], E5114, FO 371/5255, PRO; S/S FO to C. C. Baghdad, summarizing Bray’s note, September 23, 1920, E12545, FO 371/5230, PRO; IO to WO, October 12, 1920, E12571, FO 371/5230, PRO; WO to IO, October 21, 1920, E13085, FO 371/5231, PRO; Minutes, August 14, 1920, on Wilson, telegram to IO, September 5, 1920, E9849, FO 371/5228, PRO; Weakley, memo on the Standard Oil Company’s activities, December 17, 1921, enclosing Bray, Secret memo, Intrigues of the Standard Oil Company, n.d., and Captain Woolcombe (SIS), December 14, 1921, E13886, FO 371/6345, PRO; IO to FO, December 9, 1921, E13559, FO 371/6345, PRO; Turco-Russian Policy in the Middle East and in Arabia, June 23, 1927, EU 14, draft, AIR 5/485, PRO; Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Eastern Unrest, n.d. [December 1922], E14032, FO 371/7790, PRO; IDCEU, Communist Agencies in Europe for Promoting Eastern Unrest, EU 12, draft, attached to Smith, note, May 18, 1927, AIR 5/485, PRO; Young, minute, October 12, 1920, paraphrasing Cornwallis, Remarks on the preliminary report on the causes of unrest in Mesopotamia, October 12, 1920, on Bray, “Mesopotamia: Preliminary Report on Causes of Unrest,” September 14, 1920, E12339, FO 371/5230, PRO. Of course, there was some truth to the conspiracy theories—Bolsheviks were spreading anti-imperial propaganda, raiding across vaguely defined frontiers was common, and so on—but much of this activity was neither covert nor arranged by cabals, nor anywhere near as total in its power as the British imagined. See also A. L. Macfie, “British Intelligence and the Causes of the Unrest in Mesopotamia, 1919–21,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (1999): 165–177.

<sup>64</sup> Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force”; emphasis added. See also CAS, Memo on Air Force Scheme of Control in Mesopotamia, August 5, 1921, AIR 5/476, PRO; Glubb, Part III Administration of the Shamiyah Desert, in Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan, Winter 1924–1925;



dimension the controversial postwar dream of a region-wide intelligence web.<sup>65</sup> Aircraft, like conspiracy thinking, provided the security of *imagined* omniscience to an empire in the throes of rebellion.

It was in this paranoid atmosphere that Lawrence and Churchill obtained approval of the scheme at the Cairo Conference of 1921, attended by luminaries of the Arabia intelligence and political establishment. The RAF officially took over in Iraq in October 1922, although it had become the dominant military force from the 1920 rebellion. It commanded eight squadrons of fighters and light bombers, four armored car units, and several thousand Iraq Levies. Army garrisons were gradually reduced to protect only the nine RAF bases, which were equipped with wireless telegraphy. The short range of most available aircraft made advanced landing grounds and emergency fuel and bomb dumps crucial to the system. Air action was used against Turkish and Najdi raiders into Iraq (at a time when frontiers were very much a work in progress) as well as Kurdish and Arab rebellions within Iraq proper.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the promise of omniscience, the air control regime was plagued by fre-

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"Scheme for the organisation of the forces of the Crown in Mesopotamia," n.d., AIR 1/426/15/260/3, PRO; Major F. L. Robinson, commanding no. 63 Squadron, RAF in the Field, Notes on Aerial Reconnaissance in Mesopotamia, January 7, 1919, to GSI, GHQ, February 6, 1919, AIR 23/807, PRO; Salmond, Report on Command; Report on the operations on the Euphrates above Hit, n.d. [after December 1919], AIR 23/807, PRO. Wireless technology was central to removing lines of communication from insurgent reach. The usual procedure of relying on radio telegraphy as a supplement to land telegraphy and telephony was officially reversed in Iraq.

<sup>65</sup> On this dream, see Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916–1920* (University Park, Pa., 1992), 191–200; Adelson, *Mark Sykes*, 251–255; Ronald Wingate, *Wingate of the Sudan: The Life and Times of General Sir Reginald Wingate* (London, 1955), 208; WO, Intelligence Service—Middle East, to FO, July 7, 1919, W44/95339/19, FO 371/4230, PRO; Wm. Thwaites, Genstaff, WO, "'Arbur,' the Intelligence Service of the Near and Middle East," to FO, August 16, 1920, 44/800/E9979/20, FO 371/5196, PRO; Allenby to S/S WO, May 17, 1919, IOR: L/PS/10/576, BL; FO to Loraine, January 22, 1925, WO 32/3528, PRO; C. W. Jacob, "The Present Situation in the Middle East and Central Asia," May 12, 1920, AIR 23/800, PRO; Bray to Wakely, March 3, 1921, IOR: L/PS/10/866 Part 2, BL; Bell to Chirol, late December 1921, quoted in Elizabeth Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell: From Her Personal Papers* (London, 1961), 2: 258; Garbett, minute, February 5, 1920, on Bray's memo on "pan-orientalism," IOR: L/PS/11/154, BL; Appendix I of Bray, Situation in the Middle East, December 30, 1920, E16278, FO 371/5232, PRO; Cornwallis, "Intelligence Functions of the Proposed Middle-Eastern Department," October 30, 1920, E13520, FO 371/5255, PRO; WO to FO, July 7, 1919, on Permanent Intelligence Service for Middle East, W44/95339/19, FO 371/4230, PRO; Cox, telegram to Churchill, July 23, 1921, E8592/99/93/1921, FO 371/6348, PRO; Report of the interdepartmental committee on the Middle East to Churchill, January 31, 1921, CO 730/13, PRO; IDCEU, Minutes for meeting of November 7, 1924, E9788, FO 371/10110, PRO; H. F. Jacob, "A Plea for a Moslem Bureau," Arab Bureau Supplementary Paper no. 6, July 1, 1919, Cairo, 44/117491/19, FO 371/4234, PRO; Captain F. F. [Clark?] to Major Courtney, February 10, 1919; Montagu, note on the causes of the outbreak; Bray, Note on the Arabian Question, July 28, 1919, IOR: L/PS/11/154, BL. Departmental infighting, cost, and fear that such an organization would foster more than combat the conspiracies ultimately mooted a formal organization (although informal arrangements remained in place). See FO to WO Secretary to the Army Council, September 15, 1919, W44/95339/19, FO 371/4230, PRO (and minutes thereon); minutes, August 25–26, 1919, on WO proposals for creation of an Intelligence organisation, IOR: L/PS/10/576, BL.

<sup>66</sup> In theory, the Levies were to be the first responders to unrest, followed by an "air demonstration" and a dropped message threatening hostile action, then offensive action against livestock, and as a last resort, against villages. Theory was not always implemented in practice (see above). In a single two-day operation, a squadron might drop several dozen tons of bombs and thousands of incendiaries and fire thousands of rounds of small arms ammunition. The last British battalion left in 1927; the last Indian, in 1928. By 1930, the number of air squadrons was reduced to four. See CAS, Memo on Air Force Scheme of Control in Mesopotamia, August 5, 1921, and Air Staff, Notes to Show That the Military Control of Iraq by the RAF Has Proved a Success, June 20, 1923, AIR 5/476, PRO. See also Cox, "A Splendid Training Ground," for a narrative of the creation and adoption of the air control scheme.

quent reports of pilot disorientation, visibility problems, and instances “of quite inexplicable failures to identify such objects as columns of Armoured cars . . . and even whole sections of bedouin tribes on the move.”<sup>67</sup> It was not uncommon for aircraft to make a “demonstration” over or bomb the wrong town.<sup>68</sup> It also turned out that “hostile parties” could find cover in watercourses, hillocks, and other features of this “featureless” landscape.<sup>69</sup> Assessing the effect of bombing operations was “largely a matter of guesswork.”<sup>70</sup> However, in an infamously deceptive land, all this inaccuracy, indeed information itself, was of little consequence: Arnold Wilson explained that complaints about RAF observation failures were necessarily exaggerated, as was all information in the country, not least because the mirage prevented anyone from judging the accuracy of a pilot on high. Second, in the end, the accuracy issue was moot, since aircraft were meant to be everywhere at once, “conveying a silent warning.” This “*moral effect*” of patrolling aircraft “which can drop Bombs whenever necessary would effectually check disturbances.”<sup>71</sup> Air control was intended to work like the classic panopticon, for “from the ground every inhabitant of a village is under the impression that the occupant of an aeroplane is actually looking at *him* . . . establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported.”<sup>72</sup> Even if pilots could not be sure whether they were looking at “warlike” or “ordinary” tribes, Bedouin would behave because *they* could not discriminate “between bombing and reconnaissance expeditions.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, despite innumerable reported errors, the air control experiment was pronounced entirely successful in “this kind of turbulent country.”<sup>74</sup> In its Iraqi cocoon, the RAF was safe from criticism

<sup>67</sup> Major General T. Fraser, Commanding British Forces in Iraq, to WO, August 3, 1922, AIR 5/202, PRO. See also John Glubb, *The Changing Scenes of Life: An Autobiography* (London, 1983), 60; Glubb, *Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service* (London, 1978), 135; Report regarding the value of aeroplanes as main weapon of an Administration in the maintenance of law and order, compiled from reports submitted by military commanders and political officers in experience gained during the 1920 insurrection in Mesopotamia, n.d., AIR 23/800, PRO; C. H. Keith, October 29, 1926, Hinaidi, in *Flying Years*, Aviation Book Club ed. (London, 1937), 16; SSO Basrah, Memo on operations against outlaws of Albu Khalifah, to GHQ, July 19, 1921, CO 730/4, PRO.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, 18th Division, Intelligence report, June 15, 1921, AIR 1/432/15/260/23 (A-B), PRO; Dr. W. A. Wigram, “Problems of Northern Iraq,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 15 (1928): 331.

<sup>69</sup> See Sir A. Haldane, report on RAF work in Mesopotamia; Air Staff comments in column parallel with Haldane’s report, January 1921; Glubb, “Conduct of the operations: 1928–29 Year of Sibilla,” draft, Glubb Papers, Box 1, Iraq Southern Desert (3), 1928–1930, MEC; Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918–22* (Manchester, 1984), 153.

<sup>70</sup> E. A. S., minute, March 30, 1922, on a phone conversation with Wilson, CO 730/20, PRO.

<sup>71</sup> A. T. Wilson, Note on Use of Air Force in Mesopotamia, based on his impressions during 1918–1920 while acting as Civil Commissioner, February 26, 1921, AIR 5/476, PRO; Office of no. 30 Squadron, RAF, MEF, Baghdad, Report on RAF operations in South Persia, to GOC, April 8, 1919, AIR 20/521, PRO. See also Divisional Adviser, Nasiriyah, report to the adviser to the Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, June 22, 1921, 39645, CO 730/2, PRO; SSO Basrah, Memo on operations against outlaws of Albu Khalifah, to GHQ, July 19, 1921, CO 730/4, PRO; Iraq Intelligence Report for fortnight ending February 1, 1928, E754, FO 371/13027, PRO.

<sup>72</sup> Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force.” It differed crucially from Bentham’s Panopticon in that there was no provision for public surveillance of the aerial inspectors—ultimately a source of the British public’s increasingly deep suspicion of the British administration in Iraq.

<sup>73</sup> Philby, Note on the Khurma dispute, ca. July 1919, IS/19/37, FO 882/XXI. On the effectiveness of this principle, see Knox, Koweit, telegram, April 3, 1924, CO 727/9, PRO; Glubb, “Conduct of the operations: 1928–29 Year of Sibilla.”

<sup>74</sup> Salmond, Air Ministry, Iraq Command Report for October 1922–April 1924, November 1924, AIR 5/1253, PRO. Current historiography has perpetuated the idea that air force actually *worked* in desert regions as opposed to India, East Africa, and so on, because the former had “clearly defined,

of its accuracy, protected by the notorious fallibility of all news emerging from Arabia. From Iraq, air control spread to Palestine, Transjordan, and elsewhere, albeit in a modified version.<sup>75</sup>

IRREGULAR WARFARE, AS LAWRENCE UNDERSTOOD IT, could be bloodless because it depended less on attack than on the “silent threat of a vast unknown desert.”<sup>76</sup> Likewise, proponents of air control frankly admitted that terror was the scheme’s underlying principle—and the source of its humaneness. In theory, terror inspired by occasional demonstrations of destructive power would awe tribes into submission. The regime’s “moral effect” was also theoretically achieved through interference with its victims’ daily lives, through destruction of homes, villages, fuel, crops, and livestock, which would “infallibly achieve the desired result.”<sup>77</sup> Of course, the inhumanity of the system ultimately stemmed from its inability to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants, a conflation no less iniquitous in the case of violent impoverishment of villages than in simple massacre of them. Secondly, theory fails to vindicate the regime because, as Charles Townshend points out, the “moral effect” had to be “cemented at the outset by exemplary violence—in fact, terror,” which could hardly be accomplished without loss of life, a fact that early RAF statements on the system frankly admitted.<sup>78</sup> Finally, and inescapably, however diligent the RAF may have been in giving villagers twenty-four-hour warnings by loudspeaker, leaflets, and “demonstration flights,” the “pacification” of Iraq proved horrifically costly in Iraqi lives. “Recalcitrant” tribes, which included not only those attacking British communications and personnel but also those refusing to pay taxes, ultimately had to be bombed into submission. Entire villages were bombed for “general recalcitrance”—refusal to submit to government—and for harboring wanted rebel leaders, providing the lessons of an emerging science of bombing. Attempts to reduce abuses by “cooling” impulsive requests for bombers in red tape did not curtail bombing for

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completely visible targets and little possibility of cover” (Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 68; Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars* [Oxford, 1984], 29).

<sup>75</sup> See Churchill to Shuckburgh, January 11, 1922, in *Churchill*, 4/3: 1723; Omissi, *Air Power*, 28–29, 44–45; Charles Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (Boston, 1986), 99–113. These squadrons came under the Middle East Command at Cairo. In 1928, the RAF took over the Sudan and Aden, while also striving to maintain Ibn Saud’s dependence on their assistance. RAF squadrons could also be found in India, Malta, and Singapore. Air control eventually began to “substitute” for traditional forces in other parts of the empire. See David Killingray, “‘A Swift Agent of Government’: Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916–1939,” *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 429–444; Omissi, *Air Power*, 39–59.

<sup>76</sup> Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 196.

<sup>77</sup> Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force”; CAS, Memo on Air Force Scheme of Control in Mesopotamia, August 5, 1921, AIR 5/476, PRO; Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 148–149, and 150–151 on a 1922 memo for the Air Staff by the deputy director of operations on “Forms of Frightfulness”; Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*, 98. See Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 46–47, on the play of this theory among contemporary military theorists such as J. F. C. Fuller, J. M. Spaight, and Basil Liddell Hart (Lawrence’s great admirer and friend). Contemporaries credited this allegedly humane tactic to Lawrence and his guerrilla theory: see, for instance, John Buchan, *Memory Hold the Door* (London, 1940), 214.

<sup>78</sup> Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 149–150; Wing-Commander, J. A. Chamier, “The Use of Air Power for Replacing Military Garrisons,” *RUSI Journal* 66 (1921): 210, quoted in Corum, “The Myth of Air Control,” 66.

taxation and recalcitrance.<sup>79</sup> Defenders of air control effectively allowed its “moral effect” to become a synecdoche for the entire regime.<sup>80</sup>

In the wake of all this slaughter, prosaic skepticism of the regime stemming from interservice jealousy was quickly overpowered by a potent moral critique that surfaced even before the regime was fully in place.<sup>81</sup> Besides a few local agents’ criticisms of the rampant bombing of villages, Churchill and other Whitehall observers were also at least momentarily aghast at the news from Iraq. Hubert Young and his partisans criticized the Mesopotamian administration for bombing resisters of a tax that, they alleged, was in fact higher than the Turkish rate had been.<sup>82</sup> The new war secretary wrote witheringly, “If the Arab population realize that the peaceful control of Mesopotamia depends on our intention of bombing women and children, I am very doubtful if we shall gain that acquiescence of the fathers and husbands of Mesopotamia as a whole to which the Secretary of State for the Colonies looks forward.”<sup>83</sup> This critique was amplified in the press and Parliament, where many had

<sup>79</sup> See Commanding Officer of 17th Division, report, June 26, 1921, AIR 1/432/15/260/23 (A-B), PRO; Thomas, Memorandum, to PO Muntafik, July 13, 1920, E11758/2719/44/1920, FO 371/5230, PRO; [Hall?], minute, August 11, 1921, on Cox to CO, June 30, 1921, 39645, CO 730/2, PRO; SSO Basrah, Memo on operations against outlaws of Albu Khalifah; Cox to Churchill, October 6, 1921, on operations at Batas and elsewhere, CO 730/7, PRO; Omissi, *Air Power*, 174. By 1923, official procedure was as follows: The British divisional adviser on the spot would submit a request for bombers, which was passed to the Ministry of Interior, then to the high commissioner, who would evaluate the request before passing it to the air officer commanding, who examined it from an operational point of view and assessed its likely general effect. Air Ministry, telegram to AOC, February 22, 1923; AOC to Air Ministry, February 24, 1923, E741/741/65/1923, FO 371/9002, PRO. Townshend confirms that the “gentle vision” of air blockade was a self-deception, if not a conscious fraud (“Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 153). Many published sources provide descriptions of exemplary episodes; see, for instance, Peter Sluglett, *The British in Iraq, 1914–1932* (London, 1976), 262–270 (available online at <http://globalpolicy.igc.org/security/issues/iraq/history/1976sluglett.htm>; accessed November 29, 2005); Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 150–154; Corum, “The Myth of Air Control,” 67. It is difficult to say how many Iraqis were killed in these operations, from the bombs themselves as well as through starvation and the burning and machine-gunning of villages, but a hundred or more casualties were certainly not unusual in a single operation.

<sup>80</sup> A notion perpetuated in Anthony Clayton, “‘Deceptive Might’: Imperial Defence and Security, 1900–1968,” in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4: *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 291. See also Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 148, on this point.

<sup>81</sup> On critiques stemming from interservice rivalry, see, for instance, Bentnick and J. Murray, minutes, October 25, 1922, on Cox, telegram to CO, October 21, 1922, E11529, FO 371/7781, PRO; WO, Memo on Situation in Irak, February 8, 1922, CP 3708, E1561/33/65/1922, FO 371/7770, PRO. Some worried that experience in Arabia would prove useless in Europe. See Air Commodore Brooke-Popham, notes on visit to Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, 12th July to 12th August, 1921, to CAS, August 1921, Brooke-Popham Papers.

<sup>82</sup> Young, Memo on need for uniform policy in the Middle East, at the request of the S/S, June 18, 1920, E8483, FO 371/5228, PRO; Meinertzhagen, minute, October 10, 1921, on SSO Basrah, memo re effect of recent operations against outlaws of Albu Khalifah; Leachman, PO Dulaim Division, Diary of Events, May 1–20, 1920, and minutes thereon, E8608, FO 371/5076, PRO; Omissi, *Air Power*, 174; Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground,” 171. Given his druthers, Churchill would have favored nonlethal gas bombs (see Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 148), but the gas shells available caused such injuries as to prove effectively lethal. Knightley and Simpson misunderstand this interest in gas bombs; they juxtapose Lawrence’s press statements on the burning of villages in Iraq: “It is odd we do not use poison gas on these occasions . . . By gas attacks the whole population of offending districts could be wiped out neatly; and as a method of government it would be no more immoral than the present system,” with the “grim truth” that Churchill had actually considered something along these lines (*The Secret Lives of Lawrence*, 138, 157). But Lawrence was talking, *ironically*, about lethal gassing, not about Churchill’s hopes for a nonlethal alternative. Jonathan Steele also misreads the Lawrence quote in “A Mess of Our Making,” *Guardian*, January 25, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Worthington-Evans, quoted in Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 147. On these criticisms, see also Omissi, *Air Power*, 151–183.

looked upon the Iraqi venture as outdated imperial foolishness from the very outset.<sup>84</sup>

All this official displeasure quickly elicited papers from the Air Ministry on the effects of bombing on “semicivilised and uncivilised tribes.” Ultimately concluding, as any properly dithering bureaucracy would, that sufficient time had not elapsed to prove its effects, they also reminded their colleagues that air control was not unique in eliding the distinction between combatants and civilians. “[A]ll war is not only brutal but indiscriminate in its brutality,” they argued, pointing to the effects on civilians of naval bombardment, shelling of a city, blockading, trampling by invading armies, or the bombing of military facilities; at least the lives of attackers were safer in air operations.<sup>85</sup> The Air Staff adopted the voice of the realist, presenting stark realities unblinkered by sentimentality. They even succeeded, somewhat perversely, in convincing some “of the great humanity of bombing,” for, however “appalling” and “ghastly,” it ultimately lowered casualties even among the enemy by forcing them to give up sooner in the face of “continual unending interference with their normal lives.”<sup>86</sup>

The point is of course well-taken: war is brutal. Still, there is something in this defense bespeaking a moral bankruptcy bred of the recent experience of total war. Turning civilians into impromptu “soldiers” and soldiers into cannon fodder, the Great War had shown that war could no longer be restricted merely to “paid gladiators” and that the moral imperative was to minimize casualties as a whole rather than civilian deaths in particular.<sup>87</sup> Still, it is certainly specious to excuse air control on the grounds that other tactics are also brutal, especially in view of the fact that aerial bombardment is surely, in its all-seeing omnipotence, much more lethal than lower-tech forms of barbarity and that its critics may have been equally opposed to other forms of brutality.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, naval bombardment, blockades, and the like may have been equally inhumane, but they were all *wartime* measures. The Air Staff paper was meant to discuss bombing as a peacetime security measure, a policing

<sup>84</sup> See Sluglett, *The British in Iraq*, 262–270. Many historians date the defense of air control’s inhumanity to 1924, when the Labour government came to power (e.g., Corum, “The Myth of Air Control,” 66), but its main principles were in place from the outset; they were necessary as much to ease imperial officialdom’s conscience as to respond to party politics. Criticism did intensify under Labour, prompting increased secrecy around RAF operations in Iraq. See also Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 154, on this.

<sup>85</sup> Air Staff, Memorandum on effects likely to be produced by intensive aerial bombing of semi-civilised people, in Air Ministry to CID, November 26, 1921, CO 730/18, PRO. See also Brooke-Popham, “Some Notes on Aeroplanes, with Special Reference to the Air Route from Cairo to Bagdad,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 9 (1922): 139; Air Chief Marshal Sir Basil Embry, *Mission Completed* (London, 1957), 29; Air Marshal Sir Gerald Gibbs, *Survivor’s Story* (London, 1956), 38; Harris, *Bomber Offensive*, 23.

<sup>86</sup> Chairman [Lord Peel?], comment on Right Hon. Lord Thomson (S/S Air), “My Impressions of a Tour in Iraq,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 12 (1925): 211.

<sup>87</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Paris, or The Future of War* (New York, 1925), 44. See also Fussell, *The Great War*, 190. To be sure, the British government’s representation of German actions in the war as a particular threat to women and the family also helped rehabilitate the Hague conventions, giving them a “gendered, humanitarian cast” that they had not unambiguously possessed. See Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War,” *AHR* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 714–747.

<sup>88</sup> Others also find this argument specious but have not explained exactly what is wrong with it. See Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York, 1980), 274–275; Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 147–148. Several air control historians, on the other hand, find the argument compelling. See Omissi, *Air Power*, 169; Meilinger, “Trenchard and ‘Morale Bombing,’” 259; James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, Kans., 2003), 59.

technique, in “semicivilised” areas of the world such as Iraq. What was permissible only in wartime in advanced countries turned out to be *always* permissible in Iraq. In his description of the admittedly appalling bombing in Iraq, the air secretary acknowledged that things happened there “which, if they had happened before the world war, would have been undoubtedly acts of war.” It was thus that the RAF maintained its “war-time spirit” in this period, “particularly . . . in Iraq.”<sup>89</sup>

This was not merely the result of racist conjuring<sup>90</sup> but of long-circulating ideas about the kind of place Arabia was: the last bastion of the world free from bourgeois convention, a place of honor and bravery (however mindless), a place of manly sportsmanship and perennial conflict. Hence Lawrence’s investment in guerrilla warfare as a chivalrous and individualized mode of combat suited to the region, for, as the RAF intelligence officer John Glubb—later “Glubb Pasha” of the Arab Legion—put it, “Life in the desert is a continuous guerilla warfare.” You also had to strike hard and fast in Arabia because that was the way of “Bedouin war.”<sup>91</sup> To Bedouin, war was a “romantic excitement” whose production of “tragedies, bereavements, widows and orphans” was a “normal way of life,” “natural and inevitable.” Their taste for war was the source of their belief that they were “elites of the human race.” It would almost be a cultural offense *not* to bombard them with all the might of the empire.<sup>92</sup> Wilson confirmed for the Air Ministry that the problem was one of public perception, that Iraqis were used to a state of constant warfare, expected justice without kid gloves, had no patience with sentimental distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, and viewed air action as entirely “legitimate and proper.” “The natives of a lot of these tribes love fighting for fighting’s sake,” Trenchard assured Parliament. “They have no objection to being killed.”<sup>93</sup> In a place long ro-

<sup>89</sup> Thomson, “My Impressions of a Tour in Iraq,” 211; An officer in Iraq, quoted in “With the RAF in Iraq,” *Basrah Times*, May 3, 1924, in AIR 5/1298, PRO. Jon Lawrence argues that the myth of peaceableness triumphed in postwar culture and that by 1921 militarism had become marginalized as the preserve of an ultra-right-wing rump epitomized by the *Morning Post* and a handful of Bolshevik conspiracy theorists (“Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain,” *Journal of Modern History* 75 [2003]: 558), but my effort here is to make sense of how the militarism perpetuated in many parts of the empire—as Lawrence acknowledges—was made acceptable to those who otherwise deemed Britain a uniquely peaceable kingdom. On the airplane’s centrality to interwar militarism, see David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (London, 1991).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 159; Omissi, *Air Power*, 109; Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*; Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 64. Many, including Salmond, argued that people were the same everywhere and would respond in the same way to the bomber (through stages of panic, indifference, weariness, and longing for peace) (Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 149–150; Omissi, *Air Power*, 110). Certainty of this universal pattern underlay the theory of air control. True, when critics appealed to British memory of being bombarded, the RAF replied that it was “fantastic to suggest that the psychology of the tribesmen, who spend half their lives shooting each other, is similar to that of an English villager” (1936, quoted in “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 158), but the particularism here applies not to bombardment’s power to enforce submission but to the tribes’ ability to cope with it.

<sup>91</sup> Glubb, Note on the Southern Desert Force, [ca. 1930s], Glubb Papers, Box 1, Iraq Southern Desert (1), 1927–1928; Keith, October 29, 1926, Hinaidi, in *Flying Years*, 18. See also Bertram Thomas, “Adventure II, as District Officer in the Mesopotamian Insurrection of 1920,” in Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions*, 63.

<sup>92</sup> John Glubb, *Story of the Arab Legion* (London, 1948), 149; Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 148. The tribal principle of communal responsibility was also held to recommend indiscriminate punishment as a mark of cultural respect. See, for instance, Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: The Autobiography of Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the RAF* (New York, 1957), 54–55. See also Omissi, *Air Power*, 167–168, on this point.

<sup>93</sup> Wilson to the Chief of the General Staff, Mesopotamia, March 4, 1920, in Air Staff, Memo on

manticized as an oasis of a prelapsarian egalitarianism and liberty, defenders of air control could rest assured that the Bedouin retained their dignity even under bombardment and were not miserable wretches deserving of a condescending pity.<sup>94</sup> For their part, the “knight of the air,” as the ultimate machine was termed, had ironically brought chivalry, in the sense of honorable combat between elite warriors, back to an otherwise thoroughly grim and “vulgarised” modern warfare—an influence, its proponents were careful to elucidate, that was “quite distinct from the humanitarian one,” which regarded with compassion “those whom chivalry despised.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, Iraqi women and children need not trouble the conscience, for, as the British commander observed, “[Sheikhs] . . . do not seem to resent . . . that women and children are accidentally killed by bombs.” To Arabs, women and children were “negligible” casualties compared to those of “really important men,” Lawrence explained, assuring that this was “too oriental a mood for us to feel very clearly.”<sup>96</sup> Paranoia only confirmed the view that the entire Iraqi population was a latent army easily triggered into hostile action by Britain’s enemies.<sup>97</sup> What was excusable as wartime excesses against the Boche would be always permissible among this population. In 1932, the high commissioner, head of the British colonial administration in Iraq, warned against clipping the “claws” of the RAF because “*the term ‘civilian population’ has a very different meaning in Iraq from what it has in Europe . . . the whole of its male population are potential fighters as the tribes are heavily armed.*”<sup>98</sup> This was a pop-

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effects likely to be produced by intensive aerial bombing of semicivilised people, n.d., 58212, CO 730/18, PRO; Trenchard, maiden speech to the House of Lords, 1930, quoted in Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 155.

<sup>94</sup> Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 215, makes a similar point about British rule in the Middle East more generally.

<sup>95</sup> J. M. Spaight, *Air Power and War Rights* (London, 1924), 23–24, 102–103. Most of his examples of airpower’s chivalric influence are taken from the campaigns in the Middle East (105–106). Lawrence frequently invoked Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to describe man’s conquest of the air, “as lords that are expected” (see, for instance, Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw, December 9, 1933, quoted in J. Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia*, 911–912). On the perceived chivalry of aircraft, see also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*, 43–58. In France, too, aircraft were known as “knights of the air.” See Vennesson, “Institution and Airpower,” 48.

<sup>96</sup> Haldane to Churchill, November 26, 1921, in *Churchill*, 4/3: 1676; Lawrence to Liddell Hart, June 1930, quoted in Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 385. See also Omissi, *Air Power*, 164–165. Mack says that Lawrence did not anticipate the monstrous use to which bombing would be put (*A Prince of Our Disorder*, 385); indeed, an early letter confirms that Lawrence thought airpower affected irregulars only through its “moral value” (Lawrence to A. P. Wavell, May 21, 1923, in *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, 423). Nevertheless, the above comments point to a more selective humanitarianism. Even his guerrilla theory was rooted in a highly qualified horror of bloodshed: he wrote afterward that he was proudest “that I did not have any of our own blood shed. All our subject provinces to me were not worth one dead Englishman” (“The Suppressed Introductory Chapter for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*,” in *Oriental Assembly*, 144). He does seem to have reformed his view of air control later (see Lawrence to Thurtle, 1933, quoted in *A Prince of Our Disorder*, 395).

<sup>97</sup> See, for instance, “Note on Secretary of State’s Requirements,” n.d., WO 32/5806, PRO, and the accompanying table pairing imperial forces opposite “potential enemies” in their vicinity. Michael Tausig makes a similar argument about the links between paranoia and the violent prewar excesses of British officers in the rubber areas of the Putumayo (“Culture of Terror—Space of Death: Roger Casement’s Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 26 [1984]: 467–497).

<sup>98</sup> F. H. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, December 15, 1932, AIR 8/94, PRO; emphasis added. See also Air Ministry to CID, November 26, 1921, FO 730/18, PRO. This notion originated partly in turn-of-the-century Social Darwinian military science: Herbert Spencer, for instance, had argued that in “rude societies,” “all adult males are warriors; consequently, the army is the mobilized community, and the

ulation at once so orientally backward and so admirably manly and phlegmatic that, to a postwar imperium increasingly in thrall to cultural relativistic notions,<sup>99</sup> all principles of *ius in bello* were irrelevant. Even destruction of “property” did not matter as it might in an advanced civilization, given the austerity of tribal existence, a condition imagined to extend to all Iraqis.<sup>100</sup> It is useful to recall here, as a counterpoint, the premise of Lawrence’s guerrilla theory—that Bedouin could neither tactically nor temperamentally sustain casualties. Stereotypes of Arabs were, however, capacious enough to accommodate such contradictions, while British agents’ faith in their intuitive grasp ensured that all pronouncements on Arab character were sound.<sup>101</sup>

With all Iraqis transmuted into belligerents, it became easier to mute alarm about air reports by recourse to euphemism. When Churchill objected to the reporting of casualties under the “comprehensive head of ‘men and women,’”<sup>102</sup> Trenchard insisted that in countries in which combatants and noncombatants and even the sexes could not be distinguished by visual markers, all casualties should be reported in “bulk numbers” without details as to sex or age.<sup>103</sup> Air control and its indiscriminate violence were ideally suited to a place in which indiscriminate violence did not matter, as little in fact distinguished combatants from noncombatants. Casualty counts could legitimately assume that all were combatants without fear of travesty of the data. Indeed, data of any kind was so notoriously difficult to find that any amount of scrupulousness in record-keeping seemed excessive. Richard Meinertzhagen, war-time intelligence chief now at the Colonial Office, assured his colleagues in Iraq that “Bombs dropped on men in the open seldom have much effect beyond fright,” and advised dropping the matter of results, because aerial observation of casualties was

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community is the army at rest” (quoted in Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* [New Haven, Conn., 1993], 77).

<sup>99</sup> See Elleke Boehmer, “‘Immeasurable Strangeness’ in Imperial Times: Leonard Woolf and W. B. Yeats,” in Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and Empire* (Manchester, 2000), 99.

<sup>100</sup> See Air Vice-Marshal Arthur Gould Lee, *Fly Past: Highlights from a Flyer’s Life* (London, 1974), 53; Laffin, *Swifter Than Eagles*, 181.

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 189, 194. Only one officer, Lionel Charlton, chief of staff in Iraq in 1923, seems to have taken the softer view of tribal warfare as a more innocent, bloodless, sport-like style of retribution, and he resigned in outrage against the notion that “an air bomb in Iraq was, more or less, the equivalent of a police truncheon at home” (Charlton [London, 1931], 271). Others, too, suffered pangs of conscience. Meinertzhagen described an insubordinate private letter from the officer in charge of the Iraq Levies (December 7, 1921, in *Middle East Diary*, 113); see also RAF pilot Claude Hilton Keith on pilots’ general distaste for bombing anyone but the Ikhwan (*Flying Years*). Officers often asked questions about brutality. See Omissi, *Air Power*, 176. George Lloyd was a vocal critic of air control’s inability to distinguish between the innocent and guilty. Interestingly, although many of the bombing operations were directed against Kurdish Iraqis, British experts, despite their general taste for making fine ethnographic distinctions, habitually referred only to “Arabs” or, more generally, “semicivilised” tribes in their pronouncements on airpower’s suitability to the region. This says much about the degree to which these officials had come to imagine Iraq as a uniformly flat and desert terrain—as “Arabia.”

<sup>102</sup> As, for instance, in Divisional Adviser, Nasiriyah, report to the adviser to the Ministry of Interior, Baghdad, June 22, 1921. See Young to Trenchard, August 20, 1921, 39645, FO 730/2, PRO, on Churchill’s feeling.

<sup>103</sup> Trenchard to Young, August 22, 1921, 39645, CO 730/2, PRO. On Trenchard’s general intuitive bent of mind, disinterest in statistics, and liberal invocation of numbers based on little beyond his personal hunches, see Tami Davis Biddle, “British and American Approaches to Strategic Bombing: Their Origins and Implementation in the World War II Combined Bomber Offensive,” in Gooch, *Air Power*, 92. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Trenchard, who was often an outcast in official circles, felt strangely at ease in the company of Arabist agents such as Bell and Lawrence (Boyle, *Trenchard*, 383).



“always misleading.”<sup>104</sup> Even political officers’ failures to observe “results” on the ground were immaterial, for, Meinertzhagen’s colleague Reader Bullard assured, “News as to casualties will drift in from the desert gradually.”<sup>105</sup> This cavalier attitude rendered casualties entirely, well, casual: “If the Civil Commissioner is going on to Mosul,” read a GHQ telegram to Wilson, “will he be so kind as to drop a bomb on Batas”—the sort of kindness he apparently never objected to.<sup>106</sup> Striking at a phantom enemy and enjoying the bliss of willful ignorance at the outcome made air control sit more easily in the official mind. Only in Arabia, about which the British had long decided that nothing could ever really be known, did such fecklessness make sense and thus make air control acceptable.

Air control also seemed to fit comfortably in a biblical land. In 1932, when the inhumanity of air control was of some pressing importance at the disarmament conference in Geneva, the high commissioner argued that unlike the outrages inevitably committed by ground troops, “bombing from the air is regarded almost as an act of God to which there is no effective reply but immediate submission.”<sup>107</sup> Lawrence, speaking anonymously as one “who has lived among the Arabs, one whose intimate knowledge of their ways and thoughts is universally recognized,” explained the “impersonally fateful” nature of air bombing from an Arab’s point of view: “It is not punishment, but a misfortune from heaven striking the community.”<sup>108</sup> Arabia was a biblical place, and the people who lived there knew that; they expected periodic calamity and continual news of life and death. Bombardment was to them yet another kind of visitation. Air control played on Arabs’ presumed fatalism, their faith in the incontrovertible “will of God.” Such people could bear random acts of violence in a way that Europeans, coddled by secular notions of justice and human rights, could not. This view underwrote the frequent harping on the importance of not breeding too much familiarity with aircraft, lest the Arabs cease to view them as vehicles of divine retribution.<sup>109</sup>

As a biblical space, Arabia was also a place of elemental clashes between good and evil out of the realm of ordinary, mortal law. The Bedouin “world of violence, bloodshed and war” recalled for Glubb England’s forgotten “age of chivalry”: they possessed “depths of hatred, reckless bloodshed . . . lust of plunder of which our

<sup>104</sup> Meinertzhagen, minute, March 29, 1922, on Cox to S/S CO, March 25, 1922, CO 730/20, PRO. The RAF also doctored its reports to make casualties look smaller (Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 147).

<sup>105</sup> Bullard, minute, March 29, 1922, on Cox to S/S CO, March 25, 1922.

<sup>106</sup> Reported in Bell to her father, December 12, 1920, quoted in Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*, 2: 190.

<sup>107</sup> F. H. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, December 15, 1932, AIR 8/94, PRO. See also Brigadier-General P. R. C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London, 1934), 293. Stanley Baldwin began to find air warfare utterly repugnant after the conference and called for its abolition, but others vehemently protested the importance of air policing to the colonies. Unsurprisingly, the conference achieved little—particularly after Hitler came to power in 1933 and Germany rejected disarmament altogether. See J. Cox, “Splendid Training Ground,” 173; Omissi, *Air Power*, 178–181. See Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 49, on similar failures to regulate air war at the Hague in 1923.

<sup>108</sup> [Lawrence, June 1930], quoted in Basil Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* (New York, 1933), 159.

<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, C. J. Edmonds, Admintor Kirkuk, memo to Adviser to the Ministry of Interior, December 29, 1923, Edmonds Papers, MEC, Box 1, File 1. This idea had an older pedigree in late-nineteenth-century fiction; on this, see Arthur Tillotson Clark, *To Bagdad with the British* (New York, 1918), 155, 210. Cars were also favored over camels for desert defense patrols partly for this reason. See Captain R. E., SSO Nasiriyah, to “I” Branch, Air Staff, March 3, 1926, on Armed Ford Car Demonstration in the Desert, AIR 23/300, PRO.

lukewarm natures seem no longer capable . . . deeds of generosity worthy of fairy-tales and acts of treachery of extraordinary baseness.” Their “love of dramatic actions” outweighed “the dictates of reason or the material needs,” even, the general staff affirmed, overcame their “inherent dislike of getting killed.” In this last bastion of authentic experience, bombardment could be accommodated as yet another vitalizing experience—one that could be shared by the bombers equally, for since the Arab conquest of Spain, this “spirit of romance” had been absorbed into European chivalric traditions—of which airpower was a late, redemptive incarnation.<sup>110</sup> Bombardment allowed bombers to at once fulfill this atavism and give Arabs what they wanted. No group did more to confirm this than Abdul Aziz ibn Saud’s puritanical avant-garde forces, who continually raided into Iraq from neighboring Nejd, often eluding their patron’s grasp. Gertrude Bell, then a powerful intelligence and administrative force in mandatory Iraq, was fiercely proud of “our power to strike back” at the diabolical Ikhwan, who, “with their horrible fanatical appeal to a medieval faith, rouse in me the *blackest hatred*.” All concerns about cruelty were moot in a region “notorious for . . . cruelty and . . . inhuman injustices” perpetrated by these “Die-Hards of the Moslem world.”<sup>111</sup> Bloodlust made sense in heterocosmic Arabia. It was the way of the place, and the mantra was “When in Rome . . .”

These clashes between good and evil transformed the “pacification” project into a series of episodes of cosmic significance. During the rebellion, the political officer Captain Leachman wrote in bloodcurdling terms, “I should like to see . . . a regular slaughter of the Arabs in the disaffected areas. It is the only way I think.” Leachman’s adoring biographer, fellow political officer Norman Bray, describes him as living in constant fear of assassination, concluding, “No wonder he rejoiced at getting his own back, as he expresses it, or reveled in dropping bombs on Arabs concealed in a hollow.” Paranoia and the transposition of real Arabia into the Arabia of myth, the consummate spy space, made bombing palatable, even to individuals who believed they would revile it any other context. The vindication of air control did not rest merely on a simple racist dehumanization of Arabs; it grew out of long-circulating ideas about Arabia as a place somehow exempt from the this-worldliness that constrained human activity elsewhere. There heroes could reach the most exalted heights and villains the profoundest depths; there, as in literature, agents could find escape from the pitiful reality of human suffering into an exalted sphere in which everything possessed a cosmic significance. There, where each soul was free to work out its cosmic destiny, violence was entirely *personal*: Leachman’s murderer, Dhari, was the single exception to the general amnesty granted after the rebellion. He was not seen as a member of that uprising, but as someone who had violated the honor between two men; the Iraqi unrest was reconfigured as an episode of medieval battle,

<sup>110</sup> Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 148; Glubb, *Story of the Arab Legion*, 149, 159, 161; Genstaff, “Notes on Modern Arab Warfare Based in the Fighting round Rumaithah and Diwaniyah, July–August 1920,” Appendix IX in Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia*, 333. See also Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars*, 586. Many Bristol fighter planes were fitted with Sunbeam’s “Arab” engines.

<sup>111</sup> Bell to her parents, March 16, 1922, quoted in Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell*, 2: 266 (emphasis added); “The Akhwan Operations (1928) and the General Service Medal,” May 6, 1929, AIR 8/94, PRO (unsigned, but clearly by a high-ranking individual in the RAF in Iraq [other than Salmond]). See also Glubb, *War in the Desert*, 216; Lee, *Fly Past*, 77. The argument that Wahhabis were somehow beyond the pale is mutely accepted in Omissi, *Air Power*, 170. In fact, not all the victims of bombings in Wahhabi raiding areas were Wahhabis, and bombing was often used there for tax collection.

in which the mettle of chivalric men was tested and rewarded. In this “supreme crisis,” “Every quality [Leachman] possessed, *even his faults*, served the cause of England.”<sup>112</sup>

Ordering bombers was thus entirely consonant with the sensibility of the Arabist agent enchanted with notions of Arabian liberty. The agents loved Arabia for its otherworldly qualities, and it was those very qualities that made Arabia a space fit to bear the equally unearthly destruction wreaked by bombers. To put the ethical debates about airpower exclusively down to interservice jealousy<sup>113</sup> is to underestimate the importance of contemporary Britons’ understanding of the moral world of Arabia as distinct from their own. From the outset, the intelligence project in Arabia had been infused with a philosophical spirit, which did not depart it at this stage.

The Arabian window of acceptability did, however, gradually open the door to wider uses of aerial bombardment: in 1921 the Air Staff deemed it better, in view of allegations of “barbarity,” “to preserve appearances . . . by still nominally confining bombardment to targets which are strictly military . . . to avoid emphasizing the truth that air warfare has made such restrictions obsolete and impossible. It may be some time until another war occurs and meanwhile the public may become educated as to the meaning of air power.”<sup>114</sup> Arabia offered the Air Staff a means of selling the new warfare to the public by exhibiting it in a famously romantic and chivalric place where, it was known, the bourgeois rules lately exposed by the war as utterly bankrupt did not apply anyway.<sup>115</sup> There any principle not military devolved into bathos. After all, the Iraqi authorities, the Air Staff pointed out, were among the first to concede the potentialities of aircraft.<sup>116</sup> Thus, in otherworldly Arabia, bombardment became irrevocably part of this world. The gruesome relish evident in a 1924 report by OC 45 Squadron is striking in this regard:

[T]he Arab and Kurd . . . now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage; they now know that within 45 minutes a full sized village . . . can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape.

This officer later achieved distinction, and as David Omissi puts it, “in the ruins of this dying village one can dimly perceive the horrific firestorms of Hamburg and

<sup>112</sup> Leachman, July 20, 1920, quoted in Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia*, 391; *ibid.*, 406, emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> As in Omissi, *Air Power*, 163.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 159.

<sup>115</sup> Roger Beaumont argues that “the further from visibility, the more the tendency to take off the gloves” (“A New Lease on Empire: Air Policing, 1919–1939,” *Aerospace Historian*, June 1979, 89). So does Corum, “The Myth of Air Control,” 66. This view underestimates the public interest in things Arabian after the war: popular novels and films celebrated the image of the sheikh; Lawrence and other agents emerged as intensely popular and heroic figures—to both mass and elite audiences; the developmental activity in the cradle of civilization offered redemption of imperialism and technology as progressive forces; a slew of middlebrow books mused on the ancient history of the Middle East, the romance of the Middle Eastern campaigns, and the adventure of travel in Arabia. Moreover, through the early 1930s, the Air Ministry treated British audiences to a major propaganda effort to make them more “air-minded,” namely through exhibitions, air demonstrations, and pageants that drew heavily on “Eastern drama” desert themes. On this, see Omissi, *Air Power*, 171–177.

<sup>116</sup> Air Staff, “On the Policy Which Should Govern the Distribution of Air Forces and Some Considerations as to How They Should Be Employed,” April 1920, Cabinet Paper, June 1920, AIR 1/426/15/260/4, PRO.

Dresden,” for the officer was squadron leader Arthur Harris.<sup>117</sup> Tellingly, during World War II, it was largely under the influence of Harris, then head of Bomber Command, that Churchill, as prime minister, warded off periodic pangs of conscience about bombing German cities with faith in the “higher poetic justice,” that “those who have loosed these horrors upon mankind will now in their homes and persons feel the shattering stroke of retribution.”<sup>118</sup> It was the Ikhwan all over again, and Europe itself had become the scene of a clash between good and evil—a gradual transposition that dated to the days well before Hitler’s seizure of power, when “fascist” was an epithet hurled against the Saudi government and Britons began to fear that airpower would not so much secure the empire as open up the possibility of Britain’s being bombed into a *desert*.<sup>119</sup>

IDEAS ABOUT ARABIA MAY HAVE EXONERATED AIR CONTROL from charges of *inhumanity*, but the regime’s reliance on political officers on the ground, modeled on the veteran agents, was crucial to its projection of an actively humane image. Their supposed intuitive understanding of the place carried within it a claim to an empathetic style of colonial control that, in theory, kept the regime from growing distant and impersonal.

Initially, some feared that air control might prematurely make traditional po-

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Omissi, *Air Power*, 154. The draft of the Air Staff’s “Notes on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq,” presented to Parliament in August 1924, carried this sentence almost verbatim. Later drafts omitted it and stressed air control’s humaneness.

<sup>118</sup> Churchill, quoted in Gerard J. De Groot, “Why Did They Do It?” *Times Higher Education Supplement*, October 16, 1992, 18; W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (1999; trans., New York, 2003), 19–24. Omissi argues that air policing had little influence on the development of the RAF, partly because he, like others, is refuting a historiography that blames the RAF’s inadequate state of preparation for operations against an industrial power in 1939 on its imperial preoccupations (*Air Power*, 147–149, 134–135, 210; Meilinger, “Trenchard and ‘Morale Bombing,’” 244; Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground,” 176; Clayton, “‘Deceptive Might,’” 286). But Harris’s presence in Iraq is not merely a fact made trivial by the dissonance of interwar RAF views on strategic bombing; air control did train the RAF in bombardment, and it was the only significant British experience of bombing before World War II. Two and a half times as many British pilots served in Iraq as elsewhere (Cox, “A Splendid Training Ground,” 176). Harris himself testifies that his faith in the heavy bomber as the only possible salvation against the Germans was grounded in his past experience in the Middle East (*Bomber Offensive*, 9–33). It was in Iraq that Harris, bored with his work in a troop-carrying squadron, first laid the foundation of the long-range heavy bomber—by crudely but effectively converting a transport plane—and developed night bombing strategies as a means of terrorizing Arabs into thinking that airplanes could see them even in the dark. At his side were Fl. Lt. RHMS Saundby and Hon. RA Cochrane, later his right-hand men in Bomber Command. The difference in British and American understandings of strategic bombing—the former favoring general area bombing and the latter “precision” (see Biddle, “British and American Approaches,” 115–116; W. Hays Parks, “‘Precision’ and ‘Area’ Bombing: Who Did Which, and When?” in Gooch, *Air Power*, 145–174)—can also be traced to British experts’ feeling, based on the Iraqi experiment, that accuracy was of less account than moral effect. The RAF itself thought it was getting good training for its future role. See Extracts from First Lord of the Admiralty, letter, December 26, 1922, AIR 8/57, PRO; Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs*, 395. To be sure, this is not the whole story of how bombardment became part of this world—it cannot explain the Japanese attacks on China, the Spanish Civil War, the Italians in Ethiopia, the Blitz, Hiroshima, and the rest—but it is striking that Erich Ludendorff had British colonial bombings in mind when he wrote *Der Totale Krieg* (1935) (Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 68).

<sup>119</sup> On fascist Najd, see, for instance, [Glubb?], “The Iraq-Najd Frontier,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 17 (1930): 85. See Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, 54, 57, on this change in interwar novels on bombardment. These experiences and imaginings would also have informed the strength of British morale during the Blitz.

litical officers obsolete. The community of agents warned that such a development would render the British as distant and hated as the late Turkish rulers of Iraq and insisted on the need for “men who are specially gifted, who have got the feeling of the Middle East in their blood.” Indian officials speaking from long imperial experience likewise warned, “The *deus ex machina* is useful in his place, but is out of place in the day-to-day administration.”<sup>120</sup> While political officers did in the end often travel by air to reach their posts, accompany reconnaissances, and participate in bombing runs, the establishment’s gadflies had little to fear: the RAF quickly realized that it needed the cooperation of political officers on the ground to ascertain just when the desired “moral effect” had been achieved and to avoid unduly prolonging operations. They were also crucial for coping with the problems of pilot disorientation and visibility failures that continued to plague the theoretically all-seeing regime. The importance of swift action without reference to a home department in a region apparently rife with conspiracies also made a fully organized intelligence system on the ground indispensable.<sup>121</sup>

At first, the wartime political officers seemed likely to fulfill the needs of the civil government, the army, and the air force.<sup>122</sup> During the 1920 insurrection, however, the RAF found itself somewhat constrained by the scruples of existing officers because of their “reluctance . . . to appear to be alarmist, with the result that their reports were too meagre and too late.”<sup>123</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, the regime’s early excesses were blamed on airmen’s inadequate appreciation of their own “semi-political” role and blind obedience to the orders of overzealous political officers unaware of the new technology’s destructive power.<sup>124</sup> These problems were remedied by the creation of an RAF special service officer (SSO) organization, eventually consisting of a Central Bureau with agents on the outside in charge of the various zones of the country. Pilots, the SSOs, and administrative inspectors, as the former political officers were now styled, worked closely together.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Captain Hon. W. Ormsby Gore, MP, “The Organization of British Responsibilities in the Middle East,” *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 7 (1920): 95–96; Hirtzel, minute on air schemes, August 16, 1920, IOR: L/PS/10/766, BL. See also Glubb, Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan, Winter 1924–1925, April 16, 1925, AIR 23/9, PRO; Philby on British officials in Nejd, Report on his mission to Nejd, from October 29, 1917, to November 1, 1918, to A. T. Wilson, November 12, 1918, 44/4370/142/19, FO 371/4144, PRO; W. G. Elphinson, “Shaikh Mahmud of Kurdistan,” annotated TS of lecture, n.d. [interwar], in Papers of W. G. Elphinson, File “Kurds,” MEC.

<sup>121</sup> See Trenchard, personal letter to Sir W. Tyrrell, May 8, 1928, printed as CP 160 (28) “Some Problems of Air Power Illustrated by the Recent Operations in North and South Arabia,” and Trenchard to Lord Reading, April 13, 1931, in Private Papers of Rufus Daniel Isaacs (Reading), IOR: Eur Mss F118/86, BL; Glubb, *War in the Desert*, 69–70; Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 32. This relationship between airmen and agents on the ground was formally enshrined in Draft Chapters of RAF manual, enclosed in Air Ministry to AOC RAF Uxbridge, July 5, 1933, AIR 5/1203, PRO. On the ground, agents continued to experience difficulties observing the lie of the land and often asked the RAF to fly them over their area to better learn the terrain.

<sup>122</sup> See, for instance, Cox, telegram to Churchill, July 23, 1921, and [Hall?], minute, July 26, 1921, thereon, 37169, CO 730/3, PRO.

<sup>123</sup> Wing Commander K. C. Buss, memorandum on Intelligence in Iraq after 1932, in AOC Iraq to Air Ministry, September 8, 1930, AIR 2/1196, PRO.

<sup>124</sup> This was the explanation offered by the commanding officer during one particularly outrageous incident in May 1921, in which women and children taking refuge from aerial attack in a lake were machine-gunned. See Boyle, *Trenchard*, 390.

<sup>125</sup> See, for instance, Keith, January 20, 1928, in *Flying Years*, 155. SSOs took over the political officers’ intelligence functions and were under the command of Air Intelligence. In the postwar dyarchy scheme, each division was administered by a mutassarif (governor) with an “Admintor” representing the

SSOs quickly adopted their predecessors' tactics and epistemology. Intuitive ability and canny knowledge of local custom were deemed indispensable to acquisition of the information required for bombardment, given the "peculiar mentality" of the tribesmen, "who, while ready to shoot at the police, deemed it a duty to receive and to welcome a guest, although he was mapping their villages with a view to bombing them and told them so." Immersion became a universal principle of aircraft intelligence in theaters of irregular warfare, where selection of the correct air objective called for information materially different from that used against a "first class power," demanding "a comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the topography, the psychology of the enemy, his customs, characteristics," and the ability to "sift the evidence very thoroughly" for truth, skills that could "only be obtained by a special study of the people."<sup>126</sup> The ultimate goal was, as before, to be able to think like an Arab and imitate his "magical" ability to "divine" knowledge, such as the intentions of raiders, from desert signs.<sup>127</sup> These agents claimed empathy with, even love for, Arabs as the source of their genius. Immersion enabled them to overcome the near-impossibility, as one put it, of a man of one race ever understanding another, and to "interpret what is in [the Arabs'] mind."<sup>128</sup> Air Intelligence trusted SSOs to accurately "sense impending events" (if not to "dig down to the facts," a task more befitting the Secret Intelligence Service [SIS]).<sup>129</sup> Successful bombardment was often

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high commissioner at his side—taking over the political officers' administrative and advisory functions. In August 1920, there were 1,022 British, 2,216 Indian, and 8,566 Arab officials in the administration. After the creation of the Arab state under Feisal, few British officers were left behind (George Buchanan, *The Tragedy of Mesopotamia* [London, 1938], 269).

<sup>126</sup> Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 125; Draft Chapters of RAF manual; War Office, *Manual of Military Intelligence in the Field* (London, 1922), 197, 204–207, WO 287/228, PRO. Pilots, too, were encouraged to immerse themselves in Bedouin company to learn the desert. See SSO Akhwan Defence, Subject: Shortcomings of Aerial Landings on Tribes, in Aviation Baghdad, telegram to Abu Ghar, February 14, 1925, AIR 23/6, PRO; Glubb, "Conduct of the operations: 1928–29 Year of Sibilla"; A. T. Wilson, Note on Use of Air Force in Mesopotamia; Air Ministry, "Handbook of the Southern Desert of Iraq," January 1930, AIR 10/1348, PRO; CAS to Sir R. Maconachie, British Legation, Kabul, January 10, 1933, AIR 9/12, PRO; Codrington to Dent, January 5, 1928, AIR 23/433, PRO; John Alfred Codrington, "Gathering Moss, 1898–1944," memoir, TS, 1947, 282, 332, Papers of Lt.-Col. John Alfred Codrington, LHCMA.

<sup>127</sup> See Glubb, *War in the Desert*, 144, 228–229; Keith, April 25, 1927, en route to Karachi, and September 20, 1928, Mosul, in *Flying Years*, 82, 197; Glubb, Admintor in charge of Southern Desert, Samawa, "Police work in the desert," July 3, 1928, Glubb Papers, Box 1, Iraq Southern Desert (1), 1927–1928; War Office, *Manual of Military Intelligence*, 197–198; Robinson, Notes on aerial reconnaissance in Mesopotamia, to Major commanding 31st Wing, January 7, 1919; Glubb, "Conduct of the operations: 1928–29 Year of Sibilla"; Jarvis, *Arab Command*, 101.

<sup>128</sup> E. B. Howell, Deputy Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia, personal letter re: Arab amir for Iraq, December 4, 1918, Baghdad, IOR: L/PS/10/755, BL. See also Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions*, 85; Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia*, 385, 400; Edward Kinch, autobiographical notes covering early life in England and career in Iraq 1896–1959, MS, n.d., Kinch Papers, File 1/2, MEC; Glubb, *The Changing Scenes of Life*, 105; Dobbs, annual report on his officers, to CO, quoted in Bell to Florence Bell, February 28, 1924, in *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, 2: 685–686; Jarvis, *Arab Command*, 129.

<sup>129</sup> [Flight Lieut.?, AIS], Future Intelligence Organisation in Iraq, July 21, 1930, AIR 2/1196, PRO; [document on air intelligence in Iraq], n.d., AIR 2/1196, PRO. In 1921, a Secret Service Committee determined that the SIS should be exclusively responsible for espionage on an interservice basis. It would be under Foreign Office control but would retain its military title, MI6. See F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, 5 vols. (New York, 1979), 1: 17. In the atmosphere of conspiracy thinking, the SIS was keenly interested in expanding into the Middle East by the late 1920s. This was the last big gap in the SIS organization—a mark of the region's perceived uniqueness as an object of surveillance. See Minutes of 4th Meeting of sub-committee on SIS in Arabia on October 5, 1926, AIR 4/485, PRO.

attributed to SSO genius, wireless technology allowing them to communicate swiftly with aircraft—from their mouths to God’s ears.<sup>130</sup>

The security that aircraft in turn provided this ground intelligence system was lauded as the source of the regime’s ultimate benevolence: air control, its defenders argued, facilitated greater understanding between administrators and Iraqis by enabling political officers to roam without fear, providing reassuring continuity with the prewar past. Their safety in a skeletal air regime without garrisons was also no issue, for, the Middle East Department pointed out, intrepid Britons had from time immemorial served in frontier zones, at the bidding of “an adventurous spirit.” It was such men who had built up the empire and were now serving in Iraq.<sup>131</sup> Of course, the veteran agents at the Colonial Office who penned these encomiums were themselves men of such stamp, famous for their prewar and wartime adventures in Arabia, which they had pursued partly to emulate their Victorian predecessors. The austere air control regime was to them ideally suited to a country that had always been and would always be a sort of vast frontier zone, where one brave Briton would more than make up for the absence of troops.<sup>132</sup> Air control strengthened rather than weakened their feeling that in Arabia they could be as imperialists of old.

Political officers’ untrammelled mobility in turn ensured that the RAF received good intelligence and could “[pick] out the right villages and to hit [*sic*] when trouble comes.”<sup>133</sup> By this ironic logic, the RAF’s successful persecution of a village testified to their *intimacy* with people on the ground, without which they would not have been able to strike it accurately. Indeed, the claim to empathy ultimately underwrote the entire air control system, with its authoritative reassurances that bombardment was a tactic that would be respected and expected in this unique land. As late as 1957, RAF marshal Sir John Slessor defended the regime by pointing to the fact that SSOs, who knew the place best and “became so attached to their tribesmen that they sometimes almost ‘went native,’” were rarely critical of air control. Well into the 1980s, John Glubb continued to insist, “The basis of our desert control was not force but persuasion and love.” In 1989, a military historian again vindicated the regime by citing Glubb, for “No European was ever closer and more sympathetic to the Arabs than Sir John Glubb.”<sup>134</sup> And then, of course, there is the epigraph above.

<sup>130</sup> As, for instance, in the case of Glubb and Major W. J. Bovill. See J. F. A. Higgins, AVM, AOC, British Forces in Iraq to Air Ministry, November 19, 1926, AIR 5/1254, PRO; Administrative Inspector, Muntafiq Liwa, Nasiriya, Arabia Report, to Advisor to the Ministry of the Interior, Baghdad, January 3, 1925, AIR 23/3, PRO. On the importance of wireless to this work, see Draft Chapters of RAF manual.

<sup>131</sup> Bullard and Meinertzhagen, minutes, September 1921, on Cox, telegram, September 24, 1921, 48218, CO 730/5, PRO.

<sup>132</sup> See, for instance, Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions*, 85.

<sup>133</sup> CAS to Sir R. Maconachie, January 10, 1933. See also extract from S/S War, Memorandum, August 17, 1921, CP 3240, in DCAS, Extracts showing attitude of WO after Cairo Conference re Air Control in Iraq, July 1933, AIR 9/14, PRO; Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 147. Tidrick argues that a confident belief that they “knew” the Arabs helped the British, psychologically, to maintain a commanding position in an area in which international public opinion made it *difficult* to use force (*Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 208), but after the war this same confidence underwrote the use of intense force and helped deflect public criticism of it.

<sup>134</sup> Slessor, *The Central Blue*, 57; Glubb, *The Changing Scenes of Life*, 105; Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, 54. Towle is cited repeatedly in much of this secondary literature as well as in Captain David Willard Parsons, USAF, “British Air Control: A Model for the Application of Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict,” *Airpower Journal*, Summer 1994, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj94/parsons.html> (accessed December 7, 2005), which extends the ideas of Iraq’s peculiar suitability to air

At the end of the day, the claim to empathy was of course built, literally, on sand. From its Edwardian invention as an intelligence epistemology, the agents' cultivation of empathy had been bred not of recognition of a common humanity but of an effort to transform the self in order to cope in what remained irrevocably another physical and moral universe. After the war, agents, inspired partly by the legends surrounding many of their predecessors, continued to venture to Arabia to escape from the bonds of *too much* civilization, to recover a noble, free, democratic spirit lost to "utilitarian" England. Their effort to gather intelligence in the Middle East began with the same baptismal sensations of moving in a fictional, unreal, biblical, enchanted, and uncanny space. They, too, found in the desert sublime a remembrance of God, a reinvigoration of faith. Their travel in the desert was still understood as an escape into the blue, a truant fulfillment of patriotic duty. Glubb knew that "in the desert I was alone. The government was indifferent." To enter Arabia was still to exit the *customary* world, in both senses of the word, for "The desert is a world in itself."<sup>135</sup> The world of the RAF in Iraq was itself a "most extraordinary and romantic" heterotopia, only tenuously linked to "civilisation." The regime's miraculous wireless infrastructure, together with rumors of Lawrence's presence, only fed the Arabian mystique. Over the austere terrain of the biblical deserts, flight seemed to reach new heights of sublimity and even divinity.<sup>136</sup>

Immersion had originated as and remained a strategy for survival in this unique cosmos, for coping with the utter discombobulation experienced by agents and pilots there, not for producing a self-possessed compassion. Those who stayed in Iraq otherwise risked losing their mental bearings: flying over Mesopotamia had "quite a bad effect upon one's nerves," confessed Brooke-Popham after a visit. "I felt as if the end of the world had really come and there was no one left alive except my pilot and myself." Glubb stressed that for new pilots in the desert, the "sense of being lost at sea" was "a mental factor of considerable importance." Pilots, too, grew skilled at identifying "that air of quiet weariness which comes to those who have been in the

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operations up to the Persian Gulf War and then explores the uses of air control in Bosnia. See Corum, "The Myth of Air Control," 62 n. 2, 73 n. 76, 73 n. 79, 73 n. 84, for other recent U.S. works looking to the RAF in Iraq as a model. Corum cautions against swallowing this "Myth of Air Control."

<sup>135</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, 66–67, 92, 94–95, 104, 179, 215, 255; Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, 63, 93, 94, 147; Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan, Winter 1924–1925. See also Codrington, "Gathering Moss," 195, 211, 215, 332; Glubb, chapter on the conference at Jidda with Clayton and Cornwallis in 1928, n.d., Glubb Papers, Box 1, Iraq Southern Desert (3), 1928–1930; *The Changing Scenes of Life*, 71; Mann to Major Cumberbatch, August 31, 1919, Najaf, and to his mother, November 11, 1919, in James Saumarez Mann, *Administrator in the Making: James Saumarez Mann, 1893–1920*, ed. his father (London, 1921), 149, 168; Edmonds to "Chick," December 8, 1926, Edmonds Papers, Box 12, File 2; March 12, 1923, in diary, Edmonds Papers; Elizabeth Monroe, *Philby of Arabia* (1973; repr., Reading, 1998), 128; Curzon, 1921, quoted in Aaron Klieman, "Lawrence as Bureaucrat," in Stephen Tabachnick, ed., *The T. E. Lawrence Puzzle* (Athens, Ga., 1984), 248.

<sup>136</sup> Young to Shuckburgh, October 23, 1921, CO 730/16, PRO. See also Embry, *Mission Completed*, 45; Flight Lieutenant, *Reminiscences of the Royal Air Force* (New York, 1940), 89; Brooke-Popham, "Aeroplanes in Tropical Countries"; Sir Frederick Maurice and Chairman, comments on Brooke-Popham, "Some Notes on Aeroplanes," 142, 146; Prudence Hill, *To Know the Sky: The Life of Air Chief Marshal Sir Roderic Hill* (London, 1962), 95; Lee, *Fly Past*, 69, 78–79; Keith, October 26, 1926, Hinaidi; December 28, 1926; October 24, 1926; March 16, 1927, Hinaidi; December 3, 1927, Oman; March 10, 1928, Mosul, in *Flying Years*, 9, 15, 42, 66–67, 137–138, 168; *Charlton*, 269, 277–279; W. G. H. Salmond to [General?], n.d. [February 16, 1929], AIR 1/2120/207/72/6(A), PRO; Air Vice-Marshal S. F. Vincent, *Flying Fever* (London, 1972), 64. On the importance of Lawrence's presence, see, for instance, Herbert Baker's chapter in A. W. Lawrence, ed., *T. E. Lawrence, by His Friends* (London, 1937), 206.



desert too long.” In the desert, they could fall prey to “a gentle, nameless terror” that made them go temporarily mad and increasingly “fey” as time passed.<sup>137</sup> This was not a place for empathy, but for total psychic breakdown, apparently. Emulation of Arabs was intended to enable their survival in this extraterrestrial space but did not produce compassion for the Arab victims of the surreal world of bombardment that British agents and pilots in fact created by pulling the strings of fate from the sky. Thus did Iraq actually become a place beyond the reach of secular and humanitarian law. It remained beyond the gaze of legality and society, a place that agents had long used as a site for recovering an otherwise compromised *individual* sovereignty.<sup>138</sup>

True empathy was officially proscribed for the safety of the regime. SSOs were firmly warned against “the inclination to drift into native ways” and were expected to “maintain the standards of European life.” Intelligence officers were to tour continually, but strictly “without special predilections for any one of the countries.”<sup>139</sup> The ideal was someone like Glubb, who, Jarvis wrote admiringly, possessed that rare ability “to see things from the Beduin standpoint, and few Britons can do this—or if they do the tendency is to lose their English outlook entirely and with it so many attributes of the British character.”<sup>140</sup> Ultimately, the air control scheme rested on terrorizing the population with an *unfamiliar* technology; familiarity, or for that matter empathy, would only breed contempt.<sup>141</sup> As one scholar has put it, “the technique of ‘empathy’ remained a method of control”; it underwrote the mandate’s entire dyarchical structure, a highly “exacting” form of control, in Lawrence’s terms, in

<sup>137</sup> Brooke-Popham, “Aeroplanes in Tropical Countries”; Glubb, “Monotony of the Desert,” in Appendix I: Flying in the Desert, in Report on the defensive operations against the Akhwan, Winter 1924–1925; Keith, April 30, 1929, Mosul, in *Flying Years*, 240–241; Hill, *To Know the Sky*, 96–97.

<sup>138</sup> In explaining the Amritsar massacre, Derek Sayer similarly argues that the British viewed India as a different moral universe; massacre was viewed as a “moral education” for a subject population configured in this case as children (“British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920,” *Past and Present* 131 [1991]: 130–164). The British critique of this kind of moral relativism is also virtually as old as the Eastern Empire—see Burke’s words in the epigraph above; in response to Warren Hastings’s defense that the arbitrary exercise of power was the norm in India, he insisted, “the laws of morality are the same everywhere.” It is perhaps a measure of the historically complex play of moral relativism and universalism in British liberal thought that Burke found Thomas Paine’s defense of the *Rights of Man* equally objectionable.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in Omissi, *Air Power*, 157; Dent to Codrington, December 29, 1927, AIR 23/433, PRO. These proscriptions were voiced in the context of a rash of fallings-out between veteran agents and various factions of the increasingly professional intelligence and administrative establishment. The veterans, partly to assert their exclusive knowledge of the region, began increasingly to criticize British relations with the Middle East, manipulating their celebrity to advantage in public. The alleged fanatical streak of these agents runs like a red thread through the bureaucracy’s discussions of them, even as they remained indispensable sources of wisdom to that same bureaucracy. The old Arab-Celtic overlap was cited as the source of their anarchic energies: Philby, for instance, “[a]n Irishman . . . was ‘agin’ the Government, or indeed any Government, on principle” (Stirling, *Safety Last*, 117).

<sup>140</sup> Jarvis, *Arab Command*, 129.

<sup>141</sup> See [Hall?], minute, August 11, 1921, on Cox to CO, June 30, 1921; Air Staff, “On the Policy Which Should Govern the Distribution.” Aerial violence conformed with a British penal tradition that had long associated impersonality with humaneness; the ruling image here, as in the Victorian penitentiary, was “the eye of the state—impartial, humane, and vigilant—holding the ‘deviant’ in thrall of its omniscient gaze” (Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* [New York, 1978]), 113). This John Howardian paternalism (echoing the ostensibly impersonal rewards and punishments of the Smithian “invisible hand”) deserves a cultural history of its own.

which British advisers were entrusted with using their psychic, hypnotic influence to ensure that the Iraqi government ran along lines favorable to imperial interests.<sup>142</sup>

THE THEORY OF “MORAL EFFECT” ULTIMATELY MADE IT DIFFICULT for the British to determine when the Iraqi mandate was ready for full independence. Even its apparent pacification could not allow a slackening of air control, whose deterrent effect, the experts argued, was the only thing keeping the country from plunging into chaos.<sup>143</sup> In the meantime, the Middle East, “the Land of the RAF,” became as essential to British preeminence in airpower as airpower was to Britain’s ability to control the Middle East. The RAF relied on its Iraqi bases and intelligence system in order to exist as a service and to protect the *entire* empire with its borderless system of colonial control.<sup>144</sup> According to the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which ostensibly put the mandate on the path to independence, the RAF would remain for purposes of *external* defense only, but British officials’ conviction that external enemies were always entangled with internal ones ensured that they put the widest possible construction on their brief. They deemed an independent RAF *internal* intelligence service essential to the discharge of the treaty; every attempt was made to ensure that key elements of Iraqi defense—aircraft, wireless, armored cars, intelligence sources—were not shared with the nascent Iraqi Army.<sup>145</sup> None of this was to be construed as an effort to prevent the growth of Iraqi forces; it was merely a call for a “long institutional period.” In addition, the British high commissioner (and later the ambassador) would continue to exercise a right of intervention, and the British advisory staff and consuls would pass on intelligence and ensure that the Iraqi government

<sup>142</sup> Michael Asher, *Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia* (Woodstock, N.Y., 1999), 98; Lawrence, “The Changing East,” 95–96. Tidrick also makes this point but focuses on Britons’ implicit faith in the psychological ascendancy they derived from unilateral knowledge, rather than from their supposed ability to mimic Arab mental processes (*Heart-Beguiling Araby*, 207).

<sup>143</sup> Iraqi government communiqués and Arabic newspaper reports stressed the role of Iraqi forces in maintaining security, but British observers stressed the power of the bomber, as does Omissi. See Omissi, *Air Power*, 35, 37; Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare*, 153, 155; Air Ministry to FO, April 3, 1934, E2107/655/93/1934, FO 371/17864, PRO.

<sup>144</sup> See Meinertzhagen, minute, August 13, 1922, on Young, memorandum on the Middle East, CO 732/8, PRO; Third meeting of the Joint Political and Military Committee at the Cairo Conference, March 16, 1921, quoted in Gilbert, *Churchill*, 4: 550; “Notes on the value of the air route”; Air Staff, “On the Power of the Air Force”; “Notes on the work of the RAF abroad,” January 1929, AIR 9/15, PRO; Note prepared by the Middle East Department, CO, by instruction of the Cabinet Committee on Iraq, December 1922, IRQ2, CO 730/34, PRO; Air Staff, draft note, “The strategical importance of Iraq, and withdrawal of imperial forces,” November 1926, AIR 9/14, PRO; CID paper, “Iraq—Reorganisation of Defence Forces,” CID 770-B, February 23, 1927, AIR 2/2816, PRO; Reply by Sir Percy Cox to Committee’s Questionnaire, IRQ 30, Cabinet Committee on Iraq, February 1923, AIR 8/57, PRO; Trenchard to Young, October 25, 1922, responding to latter’s memorandum, CO 732/8, PRO; HC, telegram to S/S CO, February 28, 1927, AIR 2/2816, PRO; CID minutes of meeting of February 25, 1927, AIR 2/2816, PRO.

<sup>145</sup> See Humphrys to British Officers, draft, 1930, Baghdad, E2176, FO 371/14504, PRO (for Feisal’s eyes); Young, note, in Humphrys to FO, December 19, 1929, E670, FO 371/14503, PRO; Hall, note, November 12, 1931, on his and Humphrys’s examination by the PMC at Geneva, November 12, 1931, E5751, FO 371/15303, PRO; McClaughry, Air Ministry to Rendel, December 4, 1933, E7529, FO 371/16925, PRO; Buss, memorandum on Intelligence in Iraq after 1932; “Notes on Future Intelligence Organisation in Iraq,” n.d. [early 1927], AIR 2/1196, PRO; [unreadable], Air HQ, Hinaidi to Newall, AVM, Air Ministry, February 19, 1930, AIR 2/1196, PRO; J. A. Webster, Air Ministry to AVM Iraq, November 19, 1930, AIR 2/1196, PRO; E. R. Ludlow-Hewitt, AOC Iraq to Air Ministry, April 2, 1931, AIR 2/1196, PRO.

conformed to British priorities.<sup>146</sup> These arrangements were made informally, lest “foreign circles” represent it as proof that “HMG, while relinquishing the responsibilities of the mandate, will retain its advantages . . . We should certainly be accused of . . . developing a system of British intelligence officers in that administration for our own ends.” SSOs were rechristened “British Liaison Officers” and then “Air Liaison Officers” when the “independent” Iraqi government continued to object to their presence. The Air Ministry defended these continuities, despite Iraqis’ “strong national feelings” and widespread “suspicion of the activities of any British official,” by reminding Parliament that this was “an oriental country where intrigue is rife and where the people are exceptionally susceptible to subversive or inflammatory agitation.” Privately, the Air Ministry conceded, “we really have no defence.”<sup>147</sup>

Thus the British concession of Iraqi independence in 1932 was nominal at best; the Air Staff made it clear that the change upon Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations would be “more apparent than real.” The regime’s austerity allowed a discreet continuity in these arrangements, for “in countries of this sort . . . the impersonal drone of an aeroplane . . . is not so obtrusive as the constant presence in the streets of numbers of soldiers.”<sup>148</sup> Air control was a mechanism of control for a region in which more overt colonial rule was a political impossibility; even British public opinion would theoretically pose no obstacle, since the scheme was cheap enough to elude the check of taxpayers.<sup>149</sup> Air control allowed covert pursuit of empire in an increasingly anti-imperial world. Squadrons were reduced gradually, but the country was reoccupied during World War II, and the RAF departed only in 1958.

In 1960, John Glubb reflected on the ease with which humans justify their actions: Saud, a benign patriarch, had unleashed the massacring power of the Ikhwan to consolidate his power, all the while “breathing the benevolence and the service of God,” and the United States, breathing its own lofty ideals, had dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Neither, he explains, was guilty of hypocrisy, for “The human mind is a surprising mechanism.”<sup>150</sup> “Hypocrisy” is indeed useless as an *explanation*, however useful it may be as a description, of the failures of avowedly enlightened regimes. This article has attempted to lay bare the “surprising mechanism” of the British official mind that enabled it, with mostly clear conscience on the count of

<sup>146</sup> AOC Iraq, Baghdad to Air Ministry, November 15, 1926, AIR 2/1196, PRO; Ludlow-Hewitt, Annexure B: Proposed Air Intelligence Organisation in Iraq, Annexure B, in letter to Air Ministry, June 26, 1931 (after consultation with Humphrys), AHQ Hinaidi, AIR 2/1196, PRO; [Flight Lieut.?, AI5], Future Intelligence Organisation in Iraq, July 21, 1930; Sterndale-Bennett, minute, August 22, 1932, on Flood, FO, draft letter to Humphreys, re sources of information open to our ambassador in Iraq when new treaty enters into force, August 19, 1932, E4224, FO 371/16041, PRO; Humphrys, private and confidential, to Rendel, September 6, 1933, E5374, FO 371/16889, PRO; J. S. Ross, Air Ministry to AOC, August 21, 1931, AIR 2/1196, PRO.

<sup>147</sup> Draft memo based on Flood’s draft letter for Cabinet discussion, October 7, 1932, E4224, FO 371/16041, PRO; Ludlow-Hewitt to Air Ministry, May 22, 1931, AIR 2/1196, PRO; Oswald Scott, Baghdad to Rendel, FO, August 13, 1937, E5095, FO 371/20794, PRO; Air Ministry to G. W. Rendel, FO, December 4, 1933, AIR 2/1196, PRO; Barnes, minute to Rendel, December 1, 1933, E7529, FO 371/16925, PRO.

<sup>148</sup> Air Policy with Regard to Iraq, n.d. [October–November 1929], AIR 2/830, PRO; Air Staff, Note on the Status of the RAF in Iraq when that country becomes a member of the League of Nations, September 7, 1929, AIR 2/830, PRO. See also Omissi, *Air Power*, 38.

<sup>149</sup> This was explicitly stated in Salmond, Report on Command.

<sup>150</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, 221.

hypocrisy—indeed, with confidence in a consistent paternalism—to invent and implement the world’s first air control regime. The “idea of Arabia” circulated by agents over the previous twenty years provided them with a key for evading all charges of hypocrisy and brutality. While the gulf between airmen and some of their critics may never have been bridged,<sup>151</sup> enough people were convinced, indeed impressed, for the regime to remain viable for the entire interwar period.

<sup>151</sup> Townshend, “Civilization and ‘Frightfulness,’” 158.

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