Chapter III

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

Thomas Edward Lawrence, commonly known as Lawrence of Arabia, became a legend as well as an enigmatic personality in his lifetime. Works about his life and career began to be produced when he was still alive and since then there has been a spate of volumes representing a wide divergence of opinion about his literary, political and military achievements. Lawrence himself, as will be discussed later on, indulged in activities or issued statements which, it appears, were intentionally done in order to surround his personality with an aura of mistique. His admiring biographers later on proved more unscrupulous and published materials without having subjected them to critical scrutiny. As a result facts and fiction about Lawrence became so much indistinguishably mixed and closely interwoven that Harry Broughton was prompted to write

On the 16th August 1888 Thomas Edward Lawrence was born.
This is one of the facts we can be sure of among the legion of legends that have been written and told about him. (1)

However, in 1969 Knightley and Simpson were able

to bring Lawrence's real face in to focus when they produced their illuminating study: *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia*. The two writers have proved beyond doubt that Lawrence in reality was a British spy. But despite this incontrovertible revelation Lawrence enigma continues to exist.

**Lawrence the Legend** Like all legendary men Lawrence has both his admirers as well as detractors. The list of his critics is headed by Richard Aldington who in his *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry* has left no stone unturned to prove him merely an ordinary person who tactfully managed, mainly thanks to his unscrupulous biographers rather than his 'marvellous' achievements, to become a legend. But on the other hand there are a number of writers who have portrayed Lawrence as an 'Arabian Knight' or a 'King without Crown'. However, it was Lowell Thomas, an American journalist who first idolized Lawrence throughout the English speaking world. In 1917 he was sponsored by a group of pro-Allied Americans to write propaganda articles which could be published in the American press with a view to winning public opinion in favour of the Allies and thus putting pressure on the reluctant American government to enter the war against Germany. Thomas first went to France where he saw hair raising scenes of pillage
and plunder which were scarcely suitable to serve his purpose. He was, then, advised to go to the Palestine front where General Allenby's campaign, well supported by the Arab Revolt, was in full swing. Thomas was introduced to Lawrence by Ronald Storrs, then Governor of newly occupied Jerusalem. In Lawrence and the Arab Revolt Thomas found what he really wanted to write/his pro-War articles. Fortunately for him Lawrence was cooperative and told him somewhat exaggerated stories of the Arab Revolt and of course a highly coloured account of his own role in it. Thomas was credulous enough to believe all that Lawrence put in his ears. He returned to America and not only wrote his pro-War articles but also, after the general armistice, organized a series of lectures, first in New York and then across the United States, England, Australia and New Zealand. The lectures were made to appear more impressive and convincing with the help of lantern slides and a cinematograph film entitled 'With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia'. In the lectures, as can be imagined, Lawrence was projected as a shining hero, pure, perfect, and without blemish. In England alone these lectures were attended by over a million people including politicians, diplomats, men of letters and above all by King George the Fifth for whose convenience a private show was arranged. (1)

Lawrence is also reported to have watched some of Thomas's shows. But later on he became disgusted with the 'wild American,' Lawrence's own appellation for Thomas who had turned him into a matinee idol haunted by the press and fair ladies proposing marriage.

It is puzzling that why Lawrence became disgusted with the man whom he himself had encouraged to propagate his 'heroic exploits' in Arabia. His admiring biographers have offered many explanations. However, one plausible reason seems to be his habit of mystifying things about himself. In the following passage Kathryn Tidrick seems to subscribe, though partly, to the same explanation:

Lawrence was, firstly, a liar and secondly, a mystic whose talent for introspection led him to believe that a man can never know his own soul. He sometime did things for no other reason than to see what his action might reveal about himself. His own discussions of his motives, while of the greatest interest, are dangerous props for a biographer to lean on: they are all too easily to be the product either of a desire for mystification or of an effort to impose some sort of intellectual coherence on the past. (1)

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Lawrence the Arabophile

To many people Lawrence was a great Arabophile. But this claim has been disputed by others. As far Lawrence's own depiction of his personality in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is concerned it is either spurious or at least doubtful. In fact he portrays himself as one who is serving two masters: the British and the Arabs. Moreover he has depicted his inner self as a battleground where the feelings of loyalty to his national cause were pitted against his sense of betrayal to the Arabs. But whenever such a conflict arose in his mind or in the actual life he preferred to remain loyal to the British Empire rather than the Arab people. This speaks out the whole truth. That he was less an Arabophile and more an English, a faithful servant of the British Crown. His friendship with Faisal and involvement in the Arab Revolt, as will be discussed later on, was merely a tool to advance the interests of the British Empire by disintegrating the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Britain's hated enemy, the Nazi Germany.

Lawrence: A Life Sketch  Lawrence was illegitimate by birth and came to know about it when he was ten year old. Illegitimacy was highly scandalous and disgraceful according to Victorian Social morality. Lawrence was naturally perturbed by this fact of his life. However, instead of being
frustrated for ever he decided to secure a respectable place in the society by doing extraordinary and novel things, which were generally of no or little interest for the students of his age. He began to take interest in medieval military archaeology when he was merely a school boy at Oxford High School. He also became notorious among his friends for his omnivorous reading. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge and interest in novel subjects led him to study Arabia Deserta, a well written classic of Charles Doughty who explored Arabia in the 19th century. The book, in fact played a significant role in the shaping of Lawrence's future outlook.

But it was indeed D.G. Hogarth, a celebrated archaeologist and Oriental scholar—later on Lawrence's lifelong friend and principal guide—who directed his attention towards the architecture of the Crusaders' castles, in Syria and Palestine. As a result he decided to write a thesis on the same subject in order to receive his bachelor degree from the Oxford University. He acquired working knowledge of Arabic and went to Palestine and Syria in 1909. Throughout his stay in the land he made it a habit to lodge with local Arab inhabitants. The immediate results of the journey was his thesis for getting his B.A. degree which was later published under the title: Crusader Castles. During the same journey, mainly because of his lodging
with the local Arabs, he also came to know the then Arab realities. Apparently he was pained at the miserable Arab conditions and, as his biographers say, developed a sense of sympathy for them and a strong feeling of hatred for the Turks, the oppressive rulers of the Arabs.

After having passed his B.A. examination Lawrence, on the recommendation of D.G. Hogarth, was granted a small research stipend (which was barely sufficient to bear his living expenses) in order to join the British Museum's mission at Carchemish on the bank of Euphrates to excavate an ancient Hittite city. Lawrence first went to Lebanon to attend an American missionary school at Jebeil in order to improve his knowledge of Arabic. It is not clear if he was impressed by the religious zeal of American missionaries. It was, however, at Jebeil that he was joined by D.G. Hogarth and together with him embarked upon another journey across Syria. They reached Carchemish in March 1911. Lawrence worked there for three years. His main work was to direct and supervise the Arab and Kurd workmen. He freely mingled with them, learnt their customs, various Arabic dialects and the history of various Syrian Tribes.

Just before the outbreak of the first World War Lawrence joined another exploration expedition in the Sinai peninsula which in fact was a spy mission. In early 1914, sensing that Turkey, long exploited by the imperialist Britain, might take side with Germany in the event of war,
Lord Kitchener, the British Resident in Egypt, preoccupied with the defence of the Suez Canal, decided to spy out and gather information about the activities of the Turks and the Germans along with the Hijaz Railway in Sinai peninsula which was virtually unmapped till then. To cover up the espionage mission the Palestine Exploration Fund was asked to send an expeditionary party consisting of Woolley, Lawrence (both archaeologists with working Knowledge of map-making) and Captain S.F. Newcombe, a military engineer, to discover the routes the biblical of Israelites had used in their famous forty years' wandering in the wilderness. Evidently politics, scholarship and military intelligence were brought together to serve the imperial interests of Great Britain.

Lawrence and his two companions completed their expedition successfully and were preparing their report when the World War First broke out. Lawrence rushed to Egypt and put his services at the disposal of the Army's Information Service in Cairo. Initially he had three main functions to perform: to extract information by interrogating Turkish war prisoners regarding the position and distribution of Turkish troops, to write a manual for the benefit of the British officers and to draw up military maps for the use of the army.
Lawrence was later shifted, mainly because of his impish behaviour, lack of respect for authority and constant refusal to wear full military uniform, to the Arab bureau, a branch of the British Intelligence Service which was specially set up to deal with and look after the Arab affairs, particularly the Arab Revolt. It was the Arab bureau that, acting on order from the high authorities, sent Lawrence to join Faisal's Arab Army in October 1916.

The story of the Arab Revolt and Lawrence's role in it has been described at length, though not always with accuracy, in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

*Seven Pillars of Wisdom* 'The story of the production of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, writes Richard Aldington, 'is long and complicated, and highly characteristic of Lawrence's pretentious egotism'.(1) Aldington further describes the book as a 'kind of verbal dodging' which according to him is the 'virtue of politician and intriguer', and concludes that Lawrence 'might have written much better if he had


Lawrence himself has left a detailed note as to how the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was written, revised and redrafted time and again. The note was sent by the author to those who had either bought or were given gift copies of the 1926 edition. This note can be seen in the preface of the final edition of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, published after Lawrence's death by his younger brother, Arnold Wilson Lawrence.
not striven so painfully to write too well.' (1) Stanley Weintraub refers to Lawrence's masterpiece as not a very good piece of literature. 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom - as literature -; he wrote in 1963, 'does not approach so great a work as the Iliad, but rather has the inaccuracies, extravagances, diffuseness, artificiality - and sustained genius for language - of a Miltonic epic, misplaced in time.' (2)

But there are other writers who regard the Seven pillars of Wisdom as a great literary work. For Robert Graves 'it is, beyond dispute, a great book.' (3) Winston Churchill ranked it 'with the greatest books ever written in the English language.' (4) He further calls it an 'epic, a prodigy, a tale of torment, and in the heart of it - a Man.' (5) Anthony Nutting refers to it as an 'epic and a classic.' (6) He further adduces his point by quoting J.B. Villars:

The profundity of the introspection and the nakedness of the confessions make one think

1. Ibid. P. 330.
5. Ibid. P. 127.
of Rousseau or rather of Proust or Gide. Though a book on war it contributes to our researches into the obscurities of the human heart. In the course of a painful quest into a rent and complex self, and behind a screen of dignity and gravity can be perceived some very dangerous problems, few authors have described the troubled twistings of the serpent with so much penetration and sincerity.\(^1\)

Whatever the literary merit or demerit of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, it seems appropriate to make at least one observation. That Lawrence first began to write his book during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, probably after having foreseen his failure to defeat the French by pushing them out of Syria and get a 'fair deal' for his Arab friends. It may be reasonably concluded that the circumstances in which he decided to write his mind would not have been objective. He was obviously committed to a cause and as a result produced only what was suitable to serve his purpose, that is, eulogizing his role in the Arab Revolt and that of the Revolt itself in the final victory of Britain in the First World War. This point is further vindicated by the fact of many revisions and redrafting of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom which do not only show Lawrence's preoccupation with producing a literary masterpiece but also speak of

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his concern about what be included in and what be left out from the final text of the book. This is not a mere figment of imagination, rather a fact which becomes crystal clear when one makes a comparative study of the Oxford as well as the final edition of the book published by Arnold Wilson after Lawrence's death in 1935. Besides the evidence inherent in the book Knightley and Simpson have proved it beyond suspicion that Lawrence, being a member of British Intelligence, was bound by the Official Secrets Act not to write the whole truth. (1) As a result he either exaggerated or twisted some events and suppressed some inconvenient facts of his life and of the Arab Revolt.

The title *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is somewhat puzzling. It seems to have been derived from a Biblical verse:

Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn her seven pillars. \(^{(2)}\)

In a letter to H.H. Banbury Lawrence tried to unravel the mystery saying that the phrase means 'a complete edifice of knowledge,' for 'the figure seven implies completeness in Semitic languages.' (3) But there is certainly more than what Lawrence has offered as a possible explanation. The phrase,

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infact, deserves to be interpreted in the light of two other biblical verses, Deuteronomy 1:3 and Exodus 18:21(1) which enumerate seven qualities of the leaders of the people of Israel: fear of God, Wisdom, honesty, understanding, good reputation, ability and incorruptibility. Perhaps Lawrence wanted to suggest that great leaders must possess the above qualities in order to achieve success in their mission. This, on the one hand, partly explains the cause of Lawrence's own failure to prevent the injustice done to the Arabs as a result of which he portrays himself as a failed prophet between the covers of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, and, on the other, conspires to suggest that the Arabs and other eastern nations can be controlled and lorded over only by leaders equipped with the above mentioned seven qualities.

Besides the title of the book there are other things which are equally puzzling, even confusing. For instance it is not easy to decide the genre of the book. Is it an autobiography, fictionalized or real one, a memoir, a travel book or a history of the Arab Revolt? To a lay reader it appears as the book is about all these but experts have discussed it either as an autobiography or as a book of history. However

1. The two Biblical verses respectively read as follows:
   a) 'Choose men of wisdom, understanding, and repute for each of your tribes, and I will set them in authority over you.'
   b) 'But you must yourself search for capable, God fearing men among all the people, honest and incorruptible men, and appoint them over the people as officers...'

(1) Refers to the biblical verses Deuteronomy 1:3 and Exodus 18:21.
in reality it is both: an account of the Arab Revolt as Lawrence viewed it and his role in it which occasionally has been highly exaggerated. Winston Churchill appears to express the same opinion when he says that 'as a narrative of war and adventure, as a portrayal of all that the Arabs mean to the world, it is unsurpassed.' (1) In the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Lawrence has also subscribed to the same view:

> It seemed to me historically needful to reproduce the tale, as perhaps no one but myself in Feisal's army had thought of writing down at the time what we felt, what we hoped, what we tried. (2)

Apparently what the Arabs including Lawrence felt, hoped and tried was nothing but the Arab Revolt which in the author's own words was 'waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia.' (3) But just after a few lines Lawrence seems to contradict this conclusion:

> In these pages (of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom), the history is not of the Arab movement but of me in it. (4)

The contradiction seems to have been deliberately created or it might be regarded as yet another example of Lawrence's habit of mystification. Infact the book, as

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. P. 22.
stated earlier, is both a history and an autobiography.

Lawrence and the Arabs  Seven Pillars of Wisdom is a mirror in which various faces of the Arabs, their history, culture, and their struggle for freedom from the Turks are well reflected. Understandably they have been portrayed as Lawrence liked or viewed them.

Europeans - intellectuals, writers, travellers and politicians - have always felt privileged and regarded it as their inalienable right to discourse upon Oriental peoples, their religion, civilization and history. In all such discourses they, by and large, have been prisoners of an ethnocentric outlook. That Europeans, racially and intellectually, are superior to other races, especially the Arabic speaking Asians. As a result it rather becomes natural for them to regard their civilization and religion as normative of other civilizations and faiths. They further believe that their Eurocentric standards - religious and cultural - are not only a fitting scale to judge other people but also universally applicable. Obsessed with this erroneous attitude and approach they have always failed to fully understand 'other people' in an objective as manner. As for Islam is concerned they have not only failed
to apprehend it but also impudently disfigured and distorted its own image.

Lawrence's view of the Arab race, like those of countless European travellers and explorers of Arabia, is purely ethnocentric. Moreover, it is racial and divides humanity into inferior and superior classes. His approach to Arab civilization is not objective, rather he tries to understand it with priori norms, prejudices and preconceived notions. Moreover, many of his statements are mere assertions, without any argument or proper and rational justification. Besides being ethnocentric and fully conscious of his racial superiority Lawrence, while discoursing upon Semitic religiosity, appears to represent a typical spiritual dilemma that the Englishmen of Victorian era were confronted with, mainly because of some scientific discoveries which had greatly disturbed the calmness of the 'Sea of faith'. This faith versus science conflict was a problem peculiar with the Romanized, Hellenized and paganized Christianity of Europe. But the people taking side with the claims of modern science were eager to propagate this controversy as a universal phenomenon. Lawrence seems to have been somewhat influenced by the doubts raised by science and as a result feels free to criticize the Semites as a simple believing folk, 'despising doubt, the modern
crown of thorns.'(1) It is quite incomprehensible that why Lawrence, or anyone for that matter, should become critical of a people whose beliefs are free from metaphysical complexities and far away from shadows of doubts.

Lawrence is sympathetic, to some extent, towards the Arabs with whom he worked during the Arab Revolt and is bitter towards his own nation, Britain, for betraying them by breaking the promises made to Sherif Husain of Mecca. But as a whole he had a very poor opinion of the Arab race, their place in history, their faith and civilization, and their achievements in art, literature, philosophy and metaphysics. The Arabs, according to him, had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were a people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were a dogmatic people.... They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings. They knew only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating the retinue of finer shades.'(2) This is not/\end. Lawrence further portrays the Arabs as a narrow-minded people whose 'imagination were vivid but not creative.'(3) He accepts the fact that in their time of glory the Arabs patronized

1. Ibid. P. 36.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
art and literature but insists that they themselves made no worthwhile or original contribution. Nor did they handle great industries: they had no organizations of mind or body. They invented no systems of philosophy, nor complex mythologies. Moreover, they were either fanatics or sheer materialists; they 'hovered between lust and self-denial'. Their beliefs were mere assertions, no arguments, so they required a prophet to set them forth. In sum 'they were incorrigibly children of the idea, feckless and colour-blind, to whom body and spirit were forever and inevitably opposed. Their mind was strange and dark, full of depressions and exaltations, lacking in rule, but with more of ardour and more fertile in belief than any other in the world'.

Lawrence's perception of Arab civilization was almost negative. He depicts it as of 'abstract' nature, moral and intellectual but unpragmatic and non-applied. Arab civilizations undoubtedly produced excellent qualified individuals but they ended in futility for they had no public spirit or sense to put their finer abilities at the

1. Ibid. PP 36-37.
2. Ibid. p. 40.
3. Ibid. P. 37.
4. Ibid. P. 41.
5. Ibid. P. 42.
service of humanity at large. Moreover, the Arab civilizations, according to Lawrence, were fortunate in their epoch. Europe had fallen barbarous, and the memory of Greek and Latin learning was fading from men's minds. By contrast the imitative exercise (and no original contribution?) of the Arabs seemed cultured, their mental activity progressive, their state prosperous. The only real and worthwhile service they rendered to human kind was that they ably preserved something of a classical past for a medieval future.

Such were Lawrence's Arabs of history and so sterile and colourless their civilization which produced no original thinkers, philosophers and writers but only imitators. And the Arabs he was sent to work with were even worst, long oppressed by the Turks and waiting for a prophet to deliver them. However, their ordeal of waiting was about to end for the long awaited prophet had emerged on the Arabian scene in the person of Lawrence.

A prophet, according to Lawrence, must do something extraordinary and wonderful. And things look more astonishing if done in a greatly difficult situation. It was with this view that, before portraying himself as a

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
prophet of the Arabs, he felt it necessary to degrade, as he has done in the passages quoted above, the Arabs to a level of unmanageable humanity. For raising such a primitive people to the status of a civilized nation, instilling in them a sense of 'freedom', (1) self respect, and preparing them for self-rule was so splendid and extraordinary as to perform a near miracle. Indeed such was the great dispensation that Lawrence felt he was summoned to administer in Arabia:

I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts. (2)

But the Arabs, according to Saint John Philby, were a xenophobic people, (3) hence cannot accept an infidel as their prophet. Lawrence must have been aware of this reality since his wandering in Syria and Palestine during the summer of 1909. Moreover, he himself had seen the Arabs and the Turks who, before the outbreak of a war, used to accuse each other of being friends of Christian infidels, the English and the Germans, who had their

1. By freedom Lawrence never meant what the term implies in our time. He simply wanted to end the Turkish rule and bring the Arabs under British control. See Knightley and Simpsan, op. cit. P. 62.

2. Lawrence, l.c., Seven Pillars of Wisdom, op. cit. P. 22.

own colonial designs and were in fact serving their imperial interests by helping the Arabs and the Turks respectively. Besides, he was once reminded of the same fact when he, in a discussion with Faisal and his men, indiscreetly extended his regards to the Arab nationalist leaders executed by Jamal Pasha in Damascus. He was taken up sharply by Faisal’s men for sympathising with those leaders who, in their eyes, had disgraced themselves by agreeing to ‘accept French or British suzerainty as the price of help.’(1) On the same occasion Faisal made it clear to him that

We are...of necessity tied to the British. We are delighted to be their friends, grateful for their help, expectant of our future profit. But we are not British subjects. We would be more at ease if they were not so much disproportionate allies.(2)

Apparently in such circumstances Lawrence would not have expected to accomplish openly his self proclaimed prophetic mission in Arabia. Rather, in order to achieve his purpose, he, in fact, needed an Arab leader or a puppet prophet, submissive and amenable who could be easily manipulated whenever needed to serve Britain’s imperial interests. This point becomes further clear when one cores

2. Ibin.
across Lawrence's criteria for selecting an Arabian prophet. He rejected Sherif Husain, the founder, initiator and undisputed leader of the Arab Revolt as being too aged to lead a rebellion. He then met Abdullah and within minutes 'began to suspect him of constant cheerfulness (!!)

In the eyes of the Arabs Abdullah was a 'far-seeing statesman...an astute politician,' and was widely regarded as to be 'the brain of his father and the Arab revolt.' (2) Even Lawrence seems to have been impressed by his astuteness and political wisdom but doubts his sincerity, for he, though as eager as anyone else in the Arab Army, to make the rebellion a success and establish thereafter an independent Arab State, wanted his family to be recognized as the ruling Arab House. Moreover, he lacked the enthusiasm that can 'set the desert on fire.' (3) In sum he did not fulfill Lawrence's criteria to become the leader of the Arab Revolt.

As our conversation continued, I became more and more sure that Abdullah was too balanced, too cool, too humorous to be a prophet, especially the armed prophet who, if history were true, succeeded in revolutions. (4)

1. Ibid. P. 67
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. P. 68.
4. Ibid.
Lawrence then interviewed Ali, another son of the Grand Sherif, at Rabigh and found him a pleasant gentleman, conscientious, direct and dignified in manners. But he also fell short of Lawrence's high standard because he was 'without great force of character, nervous and rather tired;'(1) furthermore he was a religious scholar, literal and bookish, pious but fanatical, conscious of his high heritage hence, according to Lawrence's standard, unfit to be ambitious or to be a great leader. But in spite of all these there was something in him that prompted Lawrence to consider him at least a choice of necessity.

If Feisal should turn out to be no prophet, the revolt would make shift well enough with Ali for its lead.(2)

Zaid, Husain's fourth son from a Turkish mother 'was a shy, white, beardless lad of perhaps nineteen, calm, flippant, no zealot for the revolt.'(3) Hence there was no question of making him the leader of the Revolt.

Lawrence then went to Wadi Safra to meet Faisal. He was impressed by the later at first sight:

I felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek the leader who would bring the Arab revolt to full glory.(4)

1. Ibid. P. 76.
2. Ibid. P. 77.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. P. 92.
It is not clear from Lawrence's portrayal of Faisal that what impressed him so much. He describes him as 'tall and pillar like and very slender.' He is not depicted as possessing any of the seven qualities of the leaders of the Biblical jewery which have been stated elsewhere in this chapter. Nor is he portrayed as 'learned in law and religion' as was Ali, nor as a far-sighted statesman and astute politician as was Aocullah. He is rather presented as a simple soul, a plain personality, without a thinking brain, in sum, a perfectly suitable puppet to play the game of the real prophet that was Lawrence.

Perhaps it would not be impertinent here to enquire that what motivated Lawrence to search for an 'Arabian Knight' or an 'armed Prophet'. The Arab Revolt was started well before Lawrence's coming to Arabia by King Musain. He was undisputed leader of the Revolt with his sons fully loyal and dedicated to him. Was Lawrence's gesture aimed at sowing differences among them as the later events such as Faisal's independent military and political initiatives at his advice which resulted in a rift between him (Faisal) and his father proved it? There is reason to believe that Lawrence might have done it deliberately in order to help Britain play its imperial game in post war period thinking

1. Ibid.
that a divided Sharifian House would be easy to handle than a well-united Arab leadership.

Lawrence praises Faisal occasionally, sometimes of course in a highly flowery and exaggerated language. However, after a careful study of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* the reader is left with no choice but to regard Lawrence as the real protagonist of the Arab Revolt. Not only laymen but even clever and well-informed readers, such as Winston Churchill, have been prompted to believe that it was not Faisal or anyone else in his army but Lawrence who ably accomplished the prophetic mission of 'rousing the fierce peoples of the desert, penetrating the mysteries of their thought, leading them to the selected points of action and as often as not firing the mine himself.'(1)

Besides the medium of the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* Lawrence seems to have adopted other means to promote his self-image. In an article written in 1917 for the Arab Bulletin, an intelligence newsletter circulated

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An Arab historian, George Antonius has disputed, not only Lawrence's accounts of the Arab Revolt as presented in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, but also his projection of himself as the real leader of the rebellion. See the details in his valuable book, *The Arab Awakening*, pp. 319 - 324.
among Cairo-based British officers, he conceived of himself as the main brain behind the Arab movement. After explaining a technique that he believed he had perfected in order to control the Arabs and bend them to his end, he indirectly suggests that he was more than a mere adviser to Faisal, that is, the real leader of the Arab Army:

Wave a Sherif infront of you like a banner and ride your own mind and person. If you succeed, you will have hundreds of miles of country and thousands of men under your orders, and for this it is worth lartering the outward show. (1)

Naturally there arises a question that what purpose Lawrence wanted to serve by participating in and leading the Arab revolt to full glory and success. Did his ideas tally with those of King Husain and his sons who had raised the banner of rebellion against Turkey? It is difficult to answer this question in 'two plus two is four' terms, for Lawrence as well as his bio ranchers have successfully created a legion of legends mystifying his personality,

1. Lawrence, T.E. 'Twenty Seven Articles' in Hart, Liddell, I.E.,Lawrence in Arabia and After, London, 1945, P.144.
and have written so many contradictory things about him as to make it difficult for investigators to find out the real truth. However, as will be shown later on, the real prophet', that is, Lawrence, contrary to the common belief, had no special passion for Arab independence. Rather his aim was to bring the Arabs of the Fertile Crescent under British suzerainty.

But, contrary to Lawrence's intention, the Arabs who participated in the Arab Revolt, especially those who led it, were mighty clear in their perception, as is evident from the Husain – McMahon correspondence, that it was a national movement to get independence from the Turks. To have a better understanding of the Arab case it is necessary to fully understand the implications of the Husain–McMahon correspondence.

**Husain–McMahon Correspondence** Any discussion on Husain McMahon Correspondence will be incomplete unless the circumstances which led to it are briefly taken into account. The British felt the need for an Arab uprising only when they decided to breakup the Ottoman Empire after the latter's entry in the First World War which had started in August 1914. Infact with the outbreak of the War Turkey though weak and degenerated, had become strategically
important for the warring European countries. The Germans, well before the flare-up of the war, were trying hard to win the Turks on their side. The British however, wanted to keep them neutral. The factors behind Britain's desire or policy were numerous. First by neutralizing Turkey, they thought, they will be in a position to concentrate their whole strength on the German front, second to safeguard and keep the Black Sea Straits open in order to enable the Russians to continue their grain trade which was immensely vital or their economic solvency, third they feared that a war with the Caliph of Islam would overtax India's loyalty and disturb Egypt;\(^1\) fourth they were afraid that the Turko-German cooperation in the war would endanger their military and economic interests in the Persian Gulf and pose a potential threat to the Suez Canal which was not only vital for a 'quick passage of Indian troops'\(^2\) to the war fronts in Europe, especially France but also to defend India, the Jewel of the British Empire. The price the British were willing to pay for Turkish neutrality was a mere promise to guarantee and maintain the integrity of the Ottoman

2. Ibid.
Empire during the war. But the Germans, on the other hand, were generous enough and ready to waive, at the expense of Egypt and Greece, the judicial and financial privileges enjoyed by foreigners — the Capitulations — against which the Turks had been battling for two generations: (1)

The Turkish cabinet was divided on the question of the war. Whereas a few advocated a policy of neutrality others favoured a full fledged entry on the side of Germany. The reason was simple, they did not trust the Triple Entente. Moreover, their feeling was very strong about the humiliation they had suffered time and again at the hands of the Entente. Next, the Turks were greatly impressed by the fact that Germany had not occupied any territory of their empire while, on the contrary, the British had taken Egypt and Cyprus, the French Algeria and Tunisia and the Russians Crimea and portions of Caucasus. Turkey's mistrust was further strengthened when Britain, just before the outbreak of the war, impounded for cash two cruisers built in her shipyards on an order placed by Turkey. The Germans were quick to capitalize on this hasty British action and generously offered two of their cruisers, Goeben and Breslau to Turkey and thus succeeded to persuade them to side with them in the war.

1. Ibid.
Turkey entered the war on 29 October 1914. It was certainly not a happy news for Britain. However, they were not perturbed greatly, for they had anticipated it and were making secret plans for an Arab uprising to counter it effectively. They knew the activities of alFatat and Al'Ahd, the secret societies of the nationalist Arabs working in Syria and Iraq respectively. But they were not strong enough to cause any potential threat to Turkey. However, they were also aware that a strong Arab leader, Sherif Husain of Mecca whose relations with the Sublime Porte were not cordial, was thinking for some time to revolt against the Turks in order to assert his authority in the Hijaz. His son, Abdullah, while on his way to Turkey, had met Lord Kitchener, the British Agent in Egypt in the first week of February, 1914.

His aim was to know whether Britain would support an Arab uprising against Turkey? Kitchener discouraged the idea saying that Britain's policy was to maintain friendly relations with Turkey. Two months later, in April 1914, Abdullah met Ronald Storrs, the then secretary at the British Agency in Egypt and sought British help for an Arab revolt. But he was again discouraged on the old ground of Britain's friends ip with Turkey.

Although Kitchener and Storrs had discouraged Abdullah's ideas because Britain's official policy did
not permit them to do otherwise, their individual thinking was more or less similar. They became more inclined to the idea of an Arab Revolt when the war broke out in August 1914 and it became imminent that Turkay would become a war ally of Germany. As a result Kitchener, now Secretary of State for War, instructed Storrs to enquire from Abdullah whether his father would take side with Britain in case Turkey joins hands with Germany. Storrs immediately conveyed this message to Sherif Husain through Abdullah.

Storrs' letter put Sherif Husain in a delicate position. There were only two options open for him and the Arabs:
'to stand by Turkey in her hour of trial and earn her grateful recognition, or to rise against her and seek their freedom at the point of the Sword'. He consulted his two sons, Faisal and Abdullah. Faisal was in favour of remaining loyal to Turkey and cautioned his father about French and English designs on Syria and Iraq respectively. Moreover, he feared that the Arabs were unprepared for a revolt against Turkey. But Abdullah, already a member of a secret nationalist society, favoured an alliance with Britain and assured his father of support from the nationalist elements in Syria and Iraq. He suggested further negotiations in order to seek an absolute and clear-cut guarantee of Arab independence from Britain.

After hearing the views of his sons Sherif Husain decided to play his game cautiously. On the one hand he would try to know the State of national feeling and Arab preparedness for a general revolt by writing letters to principal Arab rulers and sending emissaries to nationalist leaders in Syria and, one the other, he would keep Kitchener in the play by expressing his willingness, through a letter to Storrs, to reach an understanding with England and hinting at a possible Arab uprising in the Hijaz on the condition that England would give him a firm promise to support it.

Storrs received the letter before the end of October 1914 and immediately conveyed its contents to Kitchener in London. Kitchener wasted no time and, on 31 October, 1914 ordered the British Agency in Cairo to write back to Abdullah informing him that if his father along with his followers was ready to ally himself with Britain against the Turks he would get all the support from Britain and that his claims in the Hijaz would be duly recognized. The letter contained a further promise of support as well as encouragement for a general Arab uprising and hinted at Britain’s ready recognition of Sherif’s Caliphate in case he proclaimed it.1

It was November the sixteenth of 1914 when Abdullah received Kitchener’s message. He was happy and satisfied.

1. In a later declaration made by Sir Henry McMahon in June 1915 Great Britain promised to make Arabia fully independent and expressed her willingness to welcome and recognize the proclamation of an Arab Caliphate. See Antonius, George, op. cit. P. 160.
for it not only promised what his father had demanded: the recognition of his autonomous position in the Hijaz but also opened the prospect of liberating other Arab provinces such as Syria and Palestine from the Turks. He immediately informed his father who, after a careful study of the letter, directed him to write back to Kitchener through the British Agency in Cairo that he (Husain) was willing to enter into an alliance with Great Britain. Husain, however, expressed his inability to raise the banner of revolt immediately. With this letter the first round of Anglo-Arab conspiracy against the Turks was over. The second phase was to begin in July 1915 when Sherif Husain sent first of the ten important letters to Henry McMahon, the then British High Commissioner in Egypt.

During the ensuing eight months, between December 1914 and July 1915, Sherif Husain, as mentioned already, was engaged in secret correspondence with the principal rulers of the Arabian Peninsula and the nationalist societies of the Arabs in Syria and Iraq. Besides Husain, there were five other rulers in the Arabian peninsula. Shaikh Mubarak Ibn Sabah was the ruler of Kuwait. He was in alliance with Great Britain since 1899 and had concluded a fresh treaty after the Turks had entered the Great War. Another ruler was al-Idrisi, fiercely anti-Turk, hence a natural ally of Husain. Moreover, he had signed a treaty of friendship with the
Government of India in April 1915. Ibn Saud of Majd was also approached by the Government of India in 1915 and consequently was assured of his independence. Ibn Saud was a far-sighted statesman. He saw in Husain's overture an ambitious plan to rule over entire Arabia. As a result his answer to Husain was cautious. He commended his lukewarm attitude towards, and his abstention from endorsing the Turkish call to Jihad but refused to extend his unconditional support to him. The two other rulers, Ibn Rashid and Imam Yahya, however, decided to stand by Turkey in her hour of need.

But by far the most encouraging response Husain received was from al-Fatat and al-İkhād. The two societies had their reservations about the intentions of the Triple Entente; they were especially suspicious of the French designs on Syria. In this regard their mode of thinking and approach were near to that of Faisal. That although very eager to throw off the Turkish domination they were unwilling to accept Europe's occupation of the Arab lands. Their aims and intentions are well-reflected in the resolution passed by al-Fatat Society just before Turkey's entry in the War:

*In consequence of Turkey's entry into the War, the fate of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire is seriously imperilled, and every effort is to be made to secure their liberation and independence; it being also resolved that, in the event of European designs appearing to materialize, the society shall be bound to work on the side of Turkey*
in order to resist foreign penetration of whatever kind or form \(^{(1)}\).

However, the members of alFatat, after intramural deliberations, drew up the famous document known as the Damascus Protocol in which they defined the conditions on which they were prepared to cooperate with Great Britain. The Protocol not only reflects Arab desire for freedom from all kinds of foreign influence and domination, Turkish or European, but also delineates the boundaries of a future independent Arab state. AlFatat sent this Protocol to Sherif Husain for his kind perusal. It was this Protocol that later formed the nexus of Husain's correspondence with Henry McMahon.

Thus after having known the inclinations and intentions of the main rulers of the Arabian peninsula through his emissaries and received the Damascus Protocol from AlFatat Husain was now (July 1915) in a better position to resume his correspondence with the British High Commission in Egypt. This time, instead of using Abdullah as a tool, Husain wrote directly to Henry McMahon. They exchanged among themselves ten letters \(^{(2)}\) which later became famous as Husain-McMahon correspondence.

\(^{(1)}\) Quoted in Antonius, George, op. cit. P. 153.

\(^{(2)}\) See the text of Husain-McMahon correspondence in Antonius, George, op. cit. PP. 414-427.
Husain was straightforward in his very first letter. He spelled out his terms and conditions for waging a revolt against Turkey in order to promote the Allied cause. That Great Britain, in event of victory in the war, would support the creation of an independent Arab State as well as recognize the declaration of an Arab Caliphate for Islam.

But McMahon, unlike Husain, was evasive on the question of the boundaries of the proposed Arab State. However, when Husain in his second letter complained of hesitancy and lukewarmth on the part of the British Government, McMahon, in his reply to this letter, accepted Husain's proposal subject to certain modifications in the boundaries demarcated by him. In McMahon's view: 'the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta, and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo', were not purely Arab, hence cannot form a part of the proposed Arab State. McMahon also clarified that the territories of the Arab chiefs with whom Britain had concluded treaties of friendship will also be excluded from the Arab State.

McMahon's reservations regarding 'certain areas' later on caused a great deal of controversy. To be brief, two diametrically opposed interpretations are offered. The British Government as well as the Zionists interpret McMahon's reservations as to exclude Palestine from the proposed Arab

1. Antonius, George, op. cit. P. 419.
State. But objective and unprejudiced historians have categorically rejected the Anglo Zionist interpretation. For instance Arnold J. Toynbee who, on a request by the Foreign Office in 1918, prepared a memorandum, namely, 'British Commitments to King Husain', wrote the following:

With regard to Palestine, His Majesty's Government are committed by Sir H. McMahon's letter to the Sherif on the 24th October, 1915, to its inclusion in the boundaries of Arab independence.¹

Toynbee further wrote in the same memorandum:

Palestine was implicitly included in King Husain's Original demands and was not explicitly excluded in Sir H. McMahon's letter of 24.10.15. We are, therefore presumably pledged to King Husain by this letter that Palestine should be 'Arab' and 'independent'.²

The controversy, in fact, arose because of Britain's contradictory pledges, first made to the Arabs through McMahon's letter of October 24, 1915 and second, to the Jews through the Balfour Declaration.³ of 1917 which precisely meant to establish a Jewish state in Palestine that according to Arnold Toynbee, as explained above, was

2. Ibid. P. 211.
already included, as per McMahon's promise, in the Arab State. Added to these contradictory promises was the Sykes-Picot Agreement secretly signed by the Entente which precisely aimed at dividing the Ottoman empire among themselves after its disintegration.

Britain's treacherous dealing with the Arabs is obvious and open for all to see. Had the Arabs come to know it before they started their revolt, they, as is evident from the resolution passed by alFatat Society, might not have sided with Great Britain. Instead it is possible that they would have supported the Turks making it difficult for General Allenby to conquer Palestine and Syria.

Since the Sykes-Picot Agreement was secret hence unknown to the Arabs until 1917 when the Bolsheviks, after seizure of power in Russia, made it public the Arabs on the basis of McMahon's promise were justifiably right to understand that in event of an allied victory there will emerge an independent Arab State. Having no semblance of doubt about Britain's sincerity they began their revolt on June 5, 1916 in Madina. Five days later, on June 10, 1916 the rebellion was started in Mecca. The Arabs quickly occupied Mecca, Jiddah, Rabigh and Yenbo.

1. See the text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in Antonius, George, op. cit. PP. 427-430.
However, the revolt afterward began to falter. Several attempts to capture Madina were successfully reversed by the Turks that demoralized the Arab Army. The situation further deteriorated from bad to worse, raising the fear that the Turks might march on Mecca and put the revolt to an end by hanging its leader, Sherif Husain. In fact the Turks had made such a plan and were all prepared to act accordingly. But fortunately for Husain the British discovered the plan and acted swiftly to counter it.

Ronald Storrs was immediately dispatched to Jedah to meet the Arab leaders and get first hand knowledge of their difficulties and requirements. Storrs was accompanied by Lawrence who frankly as well as critically talked with Abdullah, Faisal and two other sons of Husain. Later he personally got involved in the Revolt.

What was Lawrence's intention behind his involvement in the Arab Revolt? Was he really a champion of Arab freedom or a prophet bent on delivering the Arabs from the yoke of the Turkish oppression? The answer, if one is ready to believe his accounts of the Revolt as recorded in the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, is in affirmative. Husain had raised the banner of Revolt for an 'Arab aim in Arabia', and the purpose of Lawrence's participation in it was to help him restore the lost Arab glory. And when he (Lawrence) discovered his country's double-dealing with the Arabs he became critical of his Government:
The Arab revolt had begun on false pretences. To gain the Sherif's help our Cabinet had offered, through Sir Henry McMahon, to support the establishment of native governments in parts of Syria and Mesopotamia, saving the interests of our ally, France. The last modest clause concealed a treaty (Kept secret, till too late, from McMahon, and therefore from the Sherif) by which France, England and Russia agreed to annex some of these promised areas, and to establish their respective spheres of influence over all the rest.¹

Lawrence, then, proceeds to say that when the 'rumours of fraud reached the Arab ears', they 'asked me a free agent to endorse the promises of the British government'. He also claims that he 'had no previous or inner knowledge of the McMahon pledges and the Sykes-Picot treaty'.² However, he was not a 'perfect fool' as not to understand that after the victory the promises would become meaningless like a 'dead paper'. He also accepts

1. Lawrence, T.E. Seven Pillars of Wisdom, op. cit. P. 282.

2. Lawrence, T.E., Seven Pillars of Wisdom, op. cit. P. 283. Lawrence might not have been aware of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, at least until Henry McMahon was kept in the dark. However, his protestation of ignorance about McMahon correspondence seems implausible. Knightly and Simpson have proved beyond suspicion that he was not only aware of but even 'had been involved in the correspondence between Hussain and Cairo': (See The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia, op. cit. P. 60).
that had he revealed the whole truth the Arabs would have parted company with Great Britain and realigned themselves with the Turks. But to remain loyal to his country, he spoke a blatant lie to reassure his Arab friends that his Government was sincere in its promise. The Arabs were thus reassured and 'performed their fine things, but', says Lawrence, 'instead of being proud of what we did together, I was continually and bitterly ashamed'. He, however, vowed to make the Arab revolt the engine of its own success as well as a handmaid to our Egyptian campaign and vowed to lead it so madly in the final victory that expediency should counsel the Powers a fair settlement of the Arab's moral claim.

The overall picture that emerges from Lawrence's self-portrayal in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is that he was a conscientious man and fully committed to the cause of Arab independence. But in reality he was a political intelligence officer of Great Britain and as much insincere and double-faced as his Government. His double-dealing has been proved beyond doubt by Knightley and Simpson who have quoted extensively from the records of the Foreign Office to clarify their stand-point. According to the two writers, Lawrence

1. Not only Lawrence but the British Government also made false statements to reassure King Husain that Britain was bound to keep her word. See the details in Knightley and Simpson, op. cit. pp. 70-71.
2. Lawrence, l.c. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, op. cit. p. 287.
3. Ibid.
was attached to Faisal in order to watch over his activities and advise him to lead the Arab Revolt the British way and not to let it run in France's favour, so that his country's interests in Arabia will be easily served in the post war period.

Lawrence, in fact, contrary to his protestations in the Seven Pillars of Wisdom or elsewhere, never intended an independent Arab State. Rather, as is evident from The Politics of Mecca, (a confidential paper that Lawrence as a member of Cairo-based General Staff Intelligence prepared in January, 1916) his purpose behind instigating an Arab insurrection was, on the one hand, to break the Ottoman Empire which even in its decadent state was a power to be reckoned with, and, on the other, to establish numerous Arab States under British tutelage and keep them constantly at logger heads with each other through a policy of divide and rule and by promoting jealousy and rivalry among them.

(Husain's) activity seems beneficial to us, because it marches with our immediate aims, the break up of the Islamic 'bloc' and the defeat and disruption of the Ottoman Empire, and because the State he would set up to succeed the Turks would be as harmless to ourselves as Turkey was before she became a tool in German hands. The Arabs are even less stable than the Turks. If properly handled they would remain in a state of
political mosaic, a tue of small jealous principalities, incapable of cohesion, and yet always ready to combine against an outside force. The alternative to this seems to be the control and colonization by a European power other than ourselves which would inevitably come into conflict with the interests we already possess in the Near East.¹

In the same paper Lawrence further suggests to create two Caliphates and keep them embroiled in rivalry and hostility towards each other:

(Husain) has a mind to taking the place of the Turkish Government in the Hejaz himself. If we can only arrange that this political change shall be a violent one, we will have abolished the threat of Islam, by dividing it against itself, in its very heart. There will then be a Khalifa in Turkey and a Khalifa in Arabia, in theological warfare, and Islam will be as little formidable as the papacy when popes lived in Avignon.²

Lawrence not only proposed to divide Islam against itself but also suggested ways and means to achieve

¹ Quoted in Knightley and Simpson, op. cit. P. 52-53.
this purpose. In a secret memorandum: The Conquest of Syria If Complete that he prepared in early 1916, nearly a year before he practically got involved in the Arab Revolt, he urged the British Government to utilize the opportunity that the war with Turkey had offered to end the religious supremacy of the Ottoman Caliph. According to his analysis it was not possible for Britain to appoint a Caliph on her own as she had installed a Sultan in Egypt. The Sultan of Egypt, in his view, was 'loose-mouthed' and because of his special relationship with Britain was unlikely to be accepted or proclaimed as Caliph by Arab Muslims. However, Sherif Husain, he opined, would be Britain's best choice. The Sherif had considerable influence in the Hijaz and Syria. But his relations with the Turks were tense. He was even suspected by many as being disloyal to the Ottoman Caliphate. In fact, he was being held down by the Turks with the help of a Turkish corps and money. Lawrence proposed to buy the Sherif either through the Government of India or of Egypt. And to free him from the clutches of the Turkish army, he chalked out a detailed programme to destroy the Hijaz Railway that was used by the Turks for civil and military purposes and upon which they were heavily dependent for maintaining their control over Arabia. In the said paper Lawrence also evolved the tactics that he was later to use in order to cut the Pilgrim Railway.
It should, however, be clear that Lawrence's aim was not to install the Sherif as ruler or Caliph of entire Arabia as the later had demanded to be in his first letter to McMahon. Syria and Mesopotamia, in his view, should certainly be excluded from Hugain's domain or Kingdom. In 'The Conquest of Syria' he emphatically states:

If we wish to be at peace in S(cuthern) Syria and S (outhern) Mesopotamia as well, and to control the Holy cities, it is essential that the owner of Damascus should either be ourselves or some non-Muhammadan power friendly to us.1

It is thus crystal clear that Lawrence's aim, quite contrary to Arab expectation and McMahon's promise, was, first of all, to eliminate the Ottoman rule from Arabia and, second, to replace the Turks by various Arab rulers hostile to each other and, third, to establish British rule in Syria and Mesopotamia or put them under control of some friendly non-Islamic nation.

However, Lawrence's ideas underwent a drastic change when, after the publication of the Sykes-Picot Agreement by the Bolsheviks, he intelligently realized that Britain was more than ready to hand over Syria to

the French, an idea that he hated. It was this realization that led him to think of an Arab government in Damascus under British tutelage. And to strengthen the Arab position or their 'moral claim', (not their right) as he referred to it in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (P. 283) he exhausted all his energy to lead the Arab forces to occupy Damascus before General Allenby's army could do the same. He succeeded in his plan, entered Damascus triumphantly and established an Arab government under Shukri Pasha hoping that his country would appreciate the Arab contribution and, as a result, renounce the hated Sykes-Picot Agreement.

But when Allenby, in spite of this great Arab contribution to the Allied Victory, told Faisal at a conference not to do anything with the civil administration of Damascus, Lawrence realized at once that he had lost. Bitter and frustrated he exchanged hard words with Allenby. But, realizing that it would not work, he, all of a sudden, left for London.

Lawrence's sudden and abrupt departure from Damascus has been thoroughly misunderstood by many of his biographers as having been a result of his disgust with

1. For Lawrence's hatred of the French and his endeavours to keep them out of Syria See Ibid. PP 4-5 39, 75 and 228.
the Arabs and himself, especially with his role of
double-dealing. This is quite untrue. In fact his move
was well-calculated. After his conversations with Allenby
he had come to the conclusion that Britain meant to
implement the Sykes-Picot Agreement in spirit and letter.
This precisely meant his defeat. But he was not the sort
of person who could accept his defeat so easily. The
battle for post-war settlement, he realized, would be
now fought on negotiation tables in London or elsewhere
in Europe. And he decided to be there in order to get into
contact with men who were to fight the political battle.

1. In fact there is a passage in the *Seven Pillars of
Wisdom* that appears to have misled some of Lawrence's
biographers to reach at such a conclusion. But when
carefully studied the same passage seems to justify
our stand. That with the fall of Damascus Lawrence
felt his work in Arabia was finished and the scene of
battle for deciding the future of Arabia was certain
to be shifted from Arabia to London. The passage is
quoted here in full:

'I was tired to death of these Arabs; petty
incarnate Semites who attained heights and depths
beyond our reach, though not beyond our sight. They
realized our absolute in their unrestrained capacity
for good and evil; and for two years I had profitably
shammed to be their companion.

To-day it came to me with finality that my patience
as regards the false position I had been led into was
finished. A week, two weeks, three, and I would insist
upon relief. My nerve had broken; and I would be lucky
if the ruin of it could be hidden so long'. (P. 607).
A few days after his arrival in London, Lawrence became active, devised a plan and submitted it to the British Government. The plan urged Britain, first, to abandon the Sykes-Picot Agreement and, second, to divide Arabia into four states. The Hijaz was to be fully independent under King Husain. But Syria and Mesopotamia were to be cut into three states: Syria under Faisal, upper Mesopotamia under Zaid and lower Mesopotamia under Abdullah. Although Faisal, Abdullah and Zaid were to be installed Kings of their respective domains they were to have limited freedom and work under British control and tutelage.

As can be seen this plan reflects more of Lawrence's super patriotism than his love for Arabs' right to self-determination. Moreover, it was in complete consonance with his pre-war plan about Arabia that he had first formulated in The Politics of Mecca and The Conquest of Syria: instead of creating one Arab nation he proposed to set up four states.

Strikingly Lawrence's plan was similar to the Sykes-Picot Agreement in the sense that it also did not take into account the Arabs' desire for full independence and self-determination. Naturally the pro-French elements were quick to attack him saying that his championship of the Arab cause was dubious. But he remained unperturbed and replied bluntly:
Self-determination has been a great deal talked about. I think it is a foolish idea in many ways. We might allow the people who have fought with us to determine themselves. People like the Mesopotamian Arabs, who have fought against us, deserve nothing from us in the way of self-determination.\(^1\)

But in spite of Lawrence's best efforts, the plan could not be pushed through. Lawrence, undeterred by his failure, then switched to a new scheme. He successfully convinced his country that a pro-British government in Syria and Palestine would be in Britain's favour, especially to safeguard her interests in the Suez Canal and Egypt.

It was with this view that while speaking before the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet he proposed to install Faisal in Syria and Palestine under British tutelage. As regards the Balfour Declaration he informed the Committee that American Zionist Jews will be acceptable to the Arabs as adviser and financier. Convinced about the utility of the scheme the British Government asked Lawrence to persuade the Arabs and the Jews to sign an agreement of understanding and cooperation.

Lawrence had always viewed the Balfour Declaration as favourable to the Arabs and Britain. With this very view \(^1\).

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he had arranged a meeting between Faisal and Chaim Weizmann on June 4, 1918 near Aqaba, now a port city in Jordan. Weizmann had offered Faisal the Jewish help, financial and technical, in order to build a prosperous Arab Kingdom provided he would raise no objection to the Jewish immigration into Palestine. Faisal is reported to have agreed with Weizmann's idea in principle. They remained in contact with each other till the final agreement was reached at around two weeks before the Paris Peace Conference. By the time Faisal was in London, on 11 December 1918 Lawrence arranged a meeting between Faisal and Weizmann at Carlton Hotel and helped them sign the document which later came to be known as Faisal-Weizmann Agreement. According to the Agreement the British were accepted as trustee power over Palestine; the Jews were given the right to settle in Palestine and to have a say in the government.


It is interesting to note that in the Carlton Hotel only the outlines of the agreement were discussed. The final draft was to be prepared later on. However, when the final document reached Faisal on January 4, 1919 for his signature he found that certain new words - Jewish state and Jewish government - were included in it which Faisal refused to accept and insisted that they be altered to Palestine and Palestine government. This was done accordingly. But Faisal became a little more cautious and inscribed a stipulation on the draft document in Arabic which was immediately translated by Lawrence. (See Lawrence’s translation in Knightley and Simpson, op. cit. p. 118). But the translation was faulty even misleading. There is remarkable difference between Lawrence’s translation and one that was later done by George Antonius. (See the Arab Awakening, p. 43%). Some historians have accused Lawrence of misleading both, Faisal and Weizmann, to aspire for and believe what they never intended to. It is possible that Lawrence might have deliberately kept them in the dark by not telling them the whole truth, for he needed their full cooperation at the Paris Peace Conference to counter French designs on Syria.
and Faisal was to get money and financial advice from the Jews in order to keep his government solvent and initiate development programmes in his country.

This was precisely the policy which Faisal, The Zionists and the British were to pursue at the Paris Peace Conference. But this plan, as well known now, did not work. However, what is more pertinent is knowing the fact if Lawrence was really interested in promoting the Arab cause? If one goes by his so-called pro-Arab activities the answer is assuredly in affirmative. But his real intention, as revealed in a letter to Allan Dawnay that he wrote on 26 September 1919, (and obviously after the signing of the Anglo-French Agreement in this very month which, in fact, aimed at implementing the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In accordance with the Agreement the French troops replaced the British army in Syria giving the indication that they wanted to rule the country at any cost) was not to help the Arabs achieve their goal of independence but to push the French out of Syria:

The French will be on their best behaviour for months, and give Faisal his money unconditionally. Then they will try to turn the Screw. He'll say he doesn't want their money, because by then the Zionists will have a centre in Jerusalem, and for concessions they will finance him. (This
is all in writing, and fixed, but don't put it in the Press for God's sake and the French). Zionists are not a Government, and not British, and their action does not infringe the Sykes-Picot agreement.¹

On the surface it was a cunning but in reality a foolish scheme. Cunning because it aimed at abolishing the Sykes-Picot Agreement without involving Britain, and foolish because it failed to comprehend France's emotional as well as imperialist attachment with Syria. In fact, it was superficial for Lawrence to think that the French would readily leave Syria on just having been told by Faisal that they were no longer needed in his country.

However, historically speaking, such an occasion did not arise. Lawrence's plan, as indicated earlier, was successfully frustrated by consumate, clever and somewhat aggressive French diplomacy. The San Remo Conference, held in April 1920, ratified the Anglo-French Agreement of September 1919. As a result Britain was proclaimed mandatory power over Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan and France over Syria.

Lawrence, depressed and disheartened, had already retired to Oxford and got engaged in completing his unfinished Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Likewise Faisal, after

¹ Quoted in Knightley and Simpson, op. cit. P. 120.
the Paris Peace Conference, had gone to Damascus to rule his country. But a few months after the San Remo Conference, in July 1920 France ousted him at gunpoint. Neither Lawrence nor Great Britain came to his rescue. On 28 July 1920 he passed through Palestine which had come under the British mandate. Ronald Storrs who had been involved in the Arab Revolt since its beginning was present on the occasion to describe the pathos of the moment:

We mounted him (Faisal) a guard of honour a hundred strong. He carried himself with dignity and the noble resignation of Islam...though tears stood in his eyes as he was wounded to the soul. The Egyptian Sultanate (under British protection) did not recognize him, and at Quantara Station he awaited his train sitting on his luggage.¹

Lawrence's activities at the Paris Peace Conference and after have led many people to believe that he was an Arab partisan. On the contrary he was a British through and through. In fact he was associated with Faisal in order to use his influence with him to serve the interests of his country. This is evident from the remark that Arthur Balfour made about him in response to a concerted effort made by the Pro-French elements in the Foreign Office to get rid of him:

If there is a settlement, the only way of reaching it—without bloodshed—is through Faisal. and if it would be a mistake to keep him from here, I consider it would be an equal mistake to keep Lawrence from Faisal.\(^{(1)}\)

As regards his media campaign against Britain's high-handed rule in Mesopotamia it is pertinent to note that it was mainly aimed at criticising certain policies and had nothing to do with Arab aspiration for establishing an independent State. This is amply clear from the secret records (now made public) of the British Government. That he had voluntarily offered his services and free advice to quell the Iraqi rebellion against British imperialism. His one suggestion, interalia, was to establish 'a native (but not fully independent) state with English advisers only'.\(^{(2)}\) It is interesting to note that while on the one hand Lawrence, the so-called champion of Arab cause, was giving the impression, especially through his media campaign, that he was sympathetic towards the Iraqi people and on the other, he was secretly engaged in devising a scheme to frustrate the Arab aspiration and desire for complete freedom.

\(^{(1)}\) Quoted in Knightley and Simpson, op. cit. P. 126.
\(^{(2)}\) Quoted in Ibid. P. 139.
Lawrence, with his expertise and insight in the Arab affairs, was a great asset for the British. Viewing his renewed interest Winston Churchill, who by then had become the Colonial Secretary, asked him to join his staff as his personal adviser. Lawrence accepted the offer seeing in it an opportunity to actualize his old dream: to bring Arabia under British control and suzerainty. But the first problem was to suppress the rebellion. On his advice the Royal Air Force carried a series of brutal bombings and brought the rebellion to an end.

Lawrence's next step was to find out an amenable Arab ruler and devise a system of government that, without hurting the Arab nationalist feelings, would ensure the British domination and safeguard her interests in the region. In complete harmony with Churchill he devised a plan which conceived of establishing Faisal in Iraq and Abdullah in Transjordan as King and Amir respectively. Both the brothers were coerced into accepting their respective thrones through 'fast, brilliant and cynical diplomacy, complete with promises, threats and pay offs'.  

However, their father, King Husain refused to toe the line. Lawrence tried hard to persuade him to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, accept French and British mandate over

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Syria and Palestine respectively and approve of the new arrangements in Iraq and Transjordan in return for a subsidy of £100,000 a year that will enable him to rule in the Hijaz. But Husain refused to budge, insisting on British withdrawal from Palestine, lamenting on their betrayal and bitterly regretting to having raised the Arab Revolt.

King Husain was, nodoubt, nonplussed and betrayed by the British. But Lawrence had quite a different view. Having installed Faisal in Iraq and Abdullah in Transjordan he was satisfied and declared that Britain was 'quit of the War-time Eastern adventure, with clean hands'. (1) Was it really true or a travestical assertion? Indeed it was ridiculous for Lawrence to make such a claim, especially in view of the fact that the British had made many a pledge to the Arabs and fulfilled none of them. For instance they had promised them an independent Arab state but created three petty Kingdoms, one in the Hijaz, second in Transjordan, third in Iraq and imposed an undesirable mandatory system upon Syria and Palestine. Moreover in the Anglo-French Declaration (2) they had recognized the Arabs.'

1. Ibid. P. 151.

2. This declaration was announced by France and Britain a few days before the general armistice with Germany. See the text of the Declaration in Europa Pud. The Middle East and North Africa 1938, op. cit. P. 64.
right to self-determination. But instead of doing so they placed men of their own choice in Transjordan and Iraq. Viewed in this perspective Lawrence's claim of having fulfilled all Arab promises appears to be highly absurd.

However, he had reason to feel satisfaction. Well before the beginning of the Arab Revolt he had dreampt of dividing Islam against itself, to weaken the world Islamic ummah beyond recovery and by doing so to eliminate the so-called threat of Islam to Europe. With the Ottoman empire having been broken, the Arabs divided and pitted against each other (such as the conflict between Husain and Ibn Saud) Lawrence had indeed achieved his purpose. His dream had really come true.

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