

A Reassessment of the Arab Bureau:
Innovative Approaches to Military Intelligence Reporting
and Propaganda Production in the Arab Context, 1916–1920.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a comprehensive reassessment of the Arab Bureau (1916-1920), arguing that this Cairo-based branch of British military intelligence was significantly more innovative than previously recognised. Through analysis of previously overlooked Arabic materials and English-language intelligence reports, the study demonstrates how the Arab Bureau pioneered sophisticated approaches to intelligence gathering, analysis, and propaganda production during the First World War.

The research introduces the novel theoretical framework of an ‘imperial epistemic community’ to examine how the Arab Bureau combined academic expertise with intelligence operations. This concept helps explain how the organisation’s unique composition enabled innovative practices in both intelligence work and propaganda creation. Analysis of the Arab Bureau’s flagship publication, the *Arab Bulletin*, reveals unprecedented sophistication in intelligence reporting, while examination of Arabic propaganda materials, particularly the previously unstudied *Thawrat al-Arab*, demonstrates remarkable cultural and linguistic expertise in information operations.

Drawing upon methodologies from both Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, this interdisciplinary research bridges traditionally separate fields to provide new insights into how intelligence organisations operate in complex cultural environments. The study reveals how the Arab Bureau’s innovations in combining cultural knowledge with intelligence work established important precedents that continue to resonate with contemporary challenges in intelligence operations.

This research makes several original contributions: it introduces substantial new analysis of Arabic propaganda materials; it develops new theoretical frameworks for understanding intelligence operations in colonial contexts; and it demonstrates how the Arab Bureau’s innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis anticipated modern understanding of the importance of cultural expertise in intelligence work. These findings have significant implications for both historical understanding of First World War intelligence operations and contemporary intelligence practices in culturally complex environments.

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PREFACE

This DPhil offers a reassessment of the Arab Bureau as a unit of British imperial Military Intelligence (MI), which has been achieved by, among other means, a consideration of the various written materials created by the Arab Bureau through the twin lenses of Intelligence Studies and Middle Eastern studies. These written materials are primarily of two types, namely: i) English-language intelligence reports; and ii) Arabic-language propaganda material.

The majority of the propaganda material under consideration was written in Arabic and has from its production suffered widespread neglect, this in spite of the fact that much of this material is located in British archives, including the National Archives, at Kew, the British Library, and the Library and Archives of the Middle East Centre, in St Antony's College, at the University of Oxford.

In particular, this dissertation is bringing to light for consideration a major, book-length Arabic-language source, *Thawrat al-Arab (The Arab Revolt)*, written at the behest of the Arab Bureau, and published in Cairo, in December 1916, which has never before been subject to academic interrogation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Arab Bureau
AH	After Hijra
BA	(Gertrude) Bell Archive
BL	British Library
BRISMES	British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
CAB	Cabinet Office
CIC	Commander in Chief
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIE	Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire
CMES	Center for Middle Eastern Studies (Harvard)
CO	Colonial Office
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress (Turkish political party)
DID	Director of Intelligence Division (Admiralty, Naval)
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography
DUA	Durham University Archives
EEF	Egyptian Exploration Force
EMSIB	Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau
FO	Foreign Office
GC&CS	Government Code and Cipher School
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GEOINT	Geospatial intelligence
GHQ	General Headquarters
GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GSI	General Staff Intelligence
HBM	His Britannic Majesty
HC	High Commissioner
HMG	His / Her Majesty's Government
HOS	Hejaz Operations Staff
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IB	Information Bureau
IEF	Indian Expeditionary Force
IG	Government of India, Delhi & Simla
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
IMINT	Imagery intelligence
IO	India Office or Intelligence Officer
IOR	India Office Records
IRD	Information Research Department
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
MEC	Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford
MECA	Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford
MECAS	Middle East Centre for Arab Studies
MI	Military Intelligence
MI5	Military Intelligence, Section 5
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service (more formally known as SIS)
NID	Naval intelligence Division
ONE	Office of National Estimates

OSINT	Open-source intelligence
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PO	Political Officer
PRO	Public Record Office (National Archives), Kew, London
RGS	Royal Geographical Society
SIGINT	Signals intelligence
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service (informally known as MI6)
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SRO	Suffolk Record Office
SSO	Special Service Officer
T	Treasury
TNA	The National Archives (also Public Record Office), Kew, London
WO	War Office

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION and LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2009 annual lecture of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) was delivered by my friend and mentor, the late Professor Roger Owen.¹ Professor Owen's speech dealt with British and French Military Intelligence in Syria and Palestine in the First World War.² In his conclusion he included a brief observation that, "the fact that the work of experts in military intelligence like Sheffy,³ Richard Poppewell,⁴ and others seems to be so little known by historians of the Middle East speaks of a specialisation in which both sides not only do not talk to each other but do not attend the same conferences, read the same journals (for example, Intelligence and National Security) or, in some case, know of each other's existence."⁵ While already familiar with the work of the Arab Bureau, Owen's comments piqued my interest, and set me on the path to looking across the divide that continues to lie between Intelligence historians and those focussed on the Middle East.

My first literary contact with the Arab Bureau occurred at an unknown date decades ago, but it was through reading *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T.E. Lawrence,⁶ which was prompted by an even earlier encounter, with David Lean's even less historically rigorous, but cinematically peerless film *Lawrence of Arabia*.⁷ Unfortunately, it was partly due to Lawrence's semi-mythic status that serious academic research into the Arab Bureau as an entity was largely absent for many years, as scholars sought to either pursue another study of one man, or avoid him entirely, and in the process his colleagues and unit. The Lawrentian spectre continues to haunt the Arab

¹ Roger Owen (1935-2018).

² Owen (2011).

³ Yigal Sheffy, author of *British military intelligence in the Palestine campaign, 1914-1918* (1998).

⁴ Richard J. Poppewell, author of *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British intelligence and the defence of the Indian empire 1904-1924* (1995).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1935).

⁷ *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962.

Bureau, so that some are still put off looking closely at this branch of British military intelligence. It was only in existence for four-and-a-half years, from its establishment, in January 1916,⁸ until its closure when, as one of its fiercest contemporary critics later wrote, “The Arab Bureau in Cairo died unregretted in 1920”.⁹ Setting to one side this unduly harsh critique, the Arab Bureau remains one of the most fascinating branches of military intelligence from the First World War, or arguably any other period of modern history, and a promising area worthy of closer academic investigation.

The Arab Bureau occupies a unique position in intelligence history, simultaneously renowned yet understudied. Its innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis in a complex cultural environment set it apart from traditional intelligence units of its time. Although justifiably anxious about encountering the ghost of Lawrence at every turn, it is also obvious that there remain significant lacuna in our appreciation of the work carried out by the Arab Bureau. As such, this thesis fills a void in the historiography of wartime and post-war British military intelligence and imperial strategy in the Arab Middle East between 1916 and 1920.

This thesis will demonstrate that the Arab Bureau was a more innovative unit of military intelligence than has been previously understood. Where intelligence work is widely understood to include such tasks as collection, collation, and analysis, the Arab Bureau was also an effector, proactively disseminating information, or propaganda. This element, which supports the argument about the Arab Bureau’s originality, will be considered in full presently. For now, it is worth mentioning in passing that the Arab Bureau’s approach clearly foregrounds the development of later British intelligence units, including the Political Warfare Executive

⁸ FO 882/2. Minutes of a 7 January 1916 meeting, entitled “Establishment of an Arab Bureau in Cairo”.

⁹ Arnold Wilson, quoted in Westrate, *The Arab Bureau* (1992), 201.

(PWE)¹⁰ in the Second World War, and the Information Research Department (IRD)¹¹ in the Cold War era, and that this deserves to be recognised. As such, it is reasonable to argue that the Arab Bureau is the progenitor of a distinctly ‘British way’ of intelligence, a double-edged approach combining intelligence and propaganda.

A threefold approach has been used to support this thesis, dealing respectively with a) organisational innovation, b) cross-cultural communication, and, c) propaganda and information warfare. Together, this reveals how the Arab Bureau functioned not merely as an intelligence unit, but as a nexus of knowledge production and dissemination. In producing an enhanced study of the Arab Bureau and its activities, this reassessment fills a notable gap in the academic record. This thesis not only rectifies historical oversights but also offers new perspectives on the complex interplay between intelligence, cultural understanding, and imperial power during a transformative period in global history.

In arguing for the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau this study pays particular attention to the Arab Bureau’s written outputs, both English and Arabic, highlighting the procedures adopted and outcomes realised in two of the Arab Bureau’s primary professional duties: one, gathering intelligence and producing reports based on this; and, two, producing and disseminating Arabic language propaganda.

This thesis focuses specifically on the written outputs of the Arab Bureau for several key reasons. Firstly, these documents provide a direct window into the thought processes, analyses, and priorities of British intelligence agents operating in the Middle East at this time. Secondly,

¹⁰ Political Warfare Executive (PWE), 1941-1945, was a secret body, reporting to the Foreign Office, created to produce and disseminate propaganda during wartime, and wound up at the end of the war.

¹¹ Information Research Department (IRD), 1948-1977, was a secret propaganda department of the British Foreign Office.

their written outputs, reports, memoranda, correspondence, and propaganda, played a role in both informing and shaping British policy decisions, making them a fascinating resource for developing a deeper understanding of the link between intelligence gathering and policy formation. Thirdly, concentrating on these written outputs helps trace the evolution of British perceptions and misperceptions of Arab nationalism during this period, revealing how intelligence assessments both reflected and influenced broader cultural and political assumptions.

It is argued that it was precisely because of the Arab Bureau's inherently unorthodox makeup and constitution that they were able to employ greater ingenuity, allowing them to go beyond practises one might expect to find in a comparable, rigidly hierarchical, even hidebound, military unit of that period. Further, this thesis contends that this innovation was integral to their achievements. The Arab Bureau's approach fostered the emergence of innovative approaches not only to intelligence gathering and reporting, but also propaganda production and dissemination, which pioneering methods deserve greater recognition than has been the case to date.

A brief contextual note will suffice here to frame the later discussion around the establishment and activities of the Arab Bureau. Although well-trodden ground, it provides crucial background and sets the stage for the creation of the Arab Bureau, covering as it does three important points: the entry and involvement of the Ottoman empire in the war; the strategic importance of the Middle East to the Allied powers; and the emergence and evolution of British policy in the region. Together, these factors provide context that help us understand the political and military environment that necessitated the formation of the Arab Bureau.

The single most important factor leading to the creation of the Arab Bureau was the Ottoman empire's decision to enter the war on Germany's side, even if this occurred eighteen months before its eventual establishment. Long before the Ottoman entry into the war, the Middle East was strategically vital for the Allies. For instance, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the Suez Canal as a lifeline to British India. A major supply route for troops and goods, the loss of the Canal, and consequent breach in ties between British colonial interests and global communications, would arguably have presented an insurmountable obstacle to an Allied military victory. Somewhat incredibly, in spite of the region's importance, at the start of the war British policy towards the Middle East lay somewhere along a spectrum from ambivalence to disorder. While space does not permit a full analysis of the numerous reasons for this, certain important details may be noted in passing. Before Gallipoli, the British underestimated the Ottomans, lacking as they did thorough intelligence. Next, during the Sinai operations of 1915-1916, Britain switched to over-estimating Ottoman strength, an equally flawed stand compounded by insufficient intelligence to guarantee an effective advance across Sinai. Finally, the fear of Muslim unrest in India was a constant and terrifying prospect for British high command.

Two British administrations, in London and Delhi, had responsibilities in different Turkish, Arab, and Persian portions of the greater Middle East, which duties were often hostage to competing policy goals. A single Middle East policy considered acceptable by both Britain and in India was always going to be a remote possibility. As such, once the war was underway it was perhaps inevitable that divergent policies towards the region also meant the emergence of separate sets of intelligence goals, if not needs. Realising these different, sometimes competing interests, the Arab Bureau was created in part, "to harmonise British political activity in the

Near East”¹² between departments. From the start, critics, with India leading the charge, accused it of failing on all counts. That said, the government in India had long coveted even more administrative control in the region, and so criticism from that quarter was far from disinterested, and resented and worked against the Arab Bureau from the start.¹³ Setting aside the success or failure of the Arab Bureau in coordinating British intelligence activities, the sole concern here is to make clear the British government’s belief in the necessity of creating an intelligence unit with just such a goal. In this complex geopolitical landscape the Arab Bureau emerged as a novel approach to intelligence gathering and analysis. Its establishment reflected British recognition of the need for specialised knowledge and cultural understanding in navigating the intricacies of Middle Eastern politics and society in wartime, and possibly beyond.¹⁴

The Arab Bureau stands as a compelling if understudied nexus of information, intelligence, and propaganda, in the service of imperial strategy. Its actual intelligence activities remain somewhat obscured by incomplete historical narratives, meaning that the Arab Bureau maintains a distinctive position among the complex tapestry of intelligence units from this period, in that while the name of this intelligence unit is universally recognised, many details of their actual activities are not. To clarify this apparent contradiction, it is being argued that the fame – or notoriety – of the Arab Bureau, its reputation, is too often attached to, or overshadowed by, one of its number: T.E. Lawrence. Consequently, its relative obscurity stems

¹² CAB 4/6, CID 230-B, 10 January 1916.

¹³ “Members of the India Office and the government of India were often strident in their opposition to bureau objectives”, Westrate (1992), 3.

¹⁴ Without permanent status, no intelligence bureau could meaningfully settle into its work. As Gertrude Bell wrote to her father, “We want to establish here a permanent Intelligence Bureau for the Near East, which shall endure after the war is over—it would be invaluable; but it could not work properly without the sympathy and help of India.” 24 January 1916. Burgoyne (1961), 34.

from a dearth of scholarly studies providing considered, evidence-based appraisals of the operational activities of the unit as a whole.

Turning to conceptual analysis, this is the moment to discuss four terms that are central to this thesis: intelligence, specifically military intelligence, its characteristics and functions; propaganda, types of and connections to intelligence; information,¹⁵ specifically how it may be distinct from intelligence; and innovation, in the context of intelligence practices and the Arab Bureau. In this discussion it is important to remain alert to the evolution of these terms over time, and to also bear in mind the chief concern here is a specific wartime and colonial context.

In approaching a definition of intelligence it is instructive to start by highlighting previous contributions to discern if any common features apply, and if these might help establish a designation that is fit for our particular purpose. More than seventy years ago Sherman Kent¹⁶ proposed that intelligence consisted of three parts: a) knowledge that the nation¹⁷ needs to safeguard its national welfare, b) the organisation that gathers such knowledge, c) the activities pursued by this organisation. For Kent, there is an operational element to intelligence, which is to say planning and conducting military operations, which we will see not only tallies with the Arab Bureau's view of itself but which was also a central operational aspect of their responsibilities. If not universally accepted, Kent's definition remains a useful starting point, respected for its incision, and which continues to carry a degree of authority, in part by dint of its author being widely seen as the father of intelligence analysis.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Chapter 4.

¹⁶ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence* (1949).

¹⁷ Kent has the USA in mind when referring to "our nation".

¹⁸ In a 1989 discussion on intelligence challenges, Professor Ernest May, an authority on the history of intelligence, at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, was asked why he was still quoting *Strategic Intelligence* when it was written 40 years earlier, and since when hundreds more serious books on had been published. May replied, "Yes, but with concept after concept, in 40 years nobody has ever stated things as smartly as Kent."

Regarding the application of intelligence, Lowenthal inserts policy-makers, arguing that intelligence is information which “meets the stated or understood needs of policymakers and has been collected, processed, and narrowed to meet those needs.”¹⁹ In partial agreement, another contribution to the debate maintains that, “Intelligence is secret, state activity to understand or influence foreign entities.”²⁰ Notable here is the omission of any element proposing that intelligence is information necessary to support decision making. Highlighting the gap, a former senior member of the US Intelligence Community argues that, “intelligence done right is about decision-support. The process of intelligence is one that starts with a requirement, moves on to all-source collection [...] and finally toward presentation to a decision-maker of facts, estimates, known gaps, and speculative links.”²¹ In support of this view, Andrew argues that these organisations providing intelligence services to government also conduct activities that go beyond the mere collection of information.²²

These then are key in definitions of intelligence: collecting or gathering information; processing, analysing, interpreting, and circulating the same to pertinent parties; it should aim to reduce uncertainty in a commander’s decision-making procedure, at a strategic or tactical level; and it is also the organisation sanctioned by government to carry out these tasks. These apply in full to the Arab Bureau, as will be seen when looking more closely at its activities.

The definition of intelligence applied in this thesis allows us to recognise the multi-faceted nature of the Arab Bureau’s work. It was not merely collecting information, but processing it, interpreting cultural and political dynamics, and providing analytical insights that shaped

¹⁹ Lowenthal, *Intelligence: from Secrets to Policy* (2012), 9.

²⁰ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’ (2002), 21.

²¹ Steele, ‘Grand Theft, Mass Murder, & Legalized Lies’ (2018). Accessed 3 July 2024.

²² Andrew, *Secret Intelligence* (2009).

policy decisions. This understanding of intelligence encompasses both the operational activities of gathering information and the analytical processes of transforming raw data into actionable intelligence. The Arab Bureau's innovation in intelligence practices can be seen in how they combined traditional intelligence gathering with cultural understanding and local knowledge, creating a more nuanced approach to intelligence in the Middle East context.

Propaganda is the most loaded of the four terms in this thesis. In the context of the Arab Bureau, it refers to the creation and strategic dissemination of information, ideas, and cultural narratives, in Arabic, which materials were designed with the express intention of influencing the opinions, attitudes, and actions of targeted Arab populations. One material source thus excluded from this category are Arab Bureau intelligence reports. Arab Bureau propaganda, both first-hand or otherwise enabled, encompassed a range of communication methods, including overt public messaging, via newspapers and leaflets, to arguably subtler or more exclusive forms of persuasion, as in the case of *Thawrat al-Arab*. Regardless of the approach taken, all such material was produced and spread with the stated aim of advancing British interests in the region, and in keeping with propaganda's root meaning, to propagate, grow, and spread these.

Chapters Five and Six will involve close textual analysis of this Arabic language propaganda, and it is in this context that the definition will operate. Framing it in terms applicable to this thesis is vital given how far connotations surrounding the term have shifted over time. Before the twentieth century it commonly carried a meaning close to its original sense, a tool for spreading information and ideas. While detailing the shift in emphasis from seventeenth to twenty-first centuries, some scholars have nevertheless noted a common theme over this

period, which is simply to identify propaganda as, “an effective tool for gaining mass compliance, quelling dissent, and expanding political power.”²³

Following the line of thought that before the First World War propaganda was viewed more neutrally, and was properly seen as a legitimate tool of statecraft and strategy, only takes us so far. Attempts to qualify or justify what actually took place should not overlook either the wartime conditions nor the avowedly imperial intentions of those concerned in the creation of these materials. Further, if we accept at face value that before the First World War propaganda was viewed more impartially it is interesting to note that this does not appear to accord with official Arab Bureau usage. Analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* sees “Propaganda” used only sparingly and then negatively, applying to just three cases: “German”, “Turkish”, and “anti-British”.²⁴ This in mind, it is reasonable to say that the Arab Bureau understood and employed it as a far from innocent the term. Indeed, another officer working in Military Intelligence during the First World War said of his work, in 1918: “I was now in the War Office, wore the green tabs of Intelligence and wrote (horrible word) ‘propaganda.’”²⁵ If propaganda was formerly understood more neutrally, which must remain a highly charged claim, “in the 20th century, governments used it to manipulate people into war.”²⁶ As we will see later, this was as true in Arabic as it any other language.²⁷

Once they found their footing, the British sought to present themselves as protectors of Arab interests against Ottoman oppression, a policy they pursued both through traditional means and

²³ Oddo, ‘Propaganda theory and analysis’ (2023), 219.

²⁴ See Chapter 5.

²⁵ Milne, *It's Too Late Now: The Autobiography of a Writer* (1939); Chapter 13, 243. It is diverting, although ultimately fruitless, to speculate if there might be a connection between Milne’s exposure to military intelligence and his post-war creation of “a bear of very little brain”, Winnie-the-Pooh.

²⁶ Oddo (2023), 219.

²⁷ See Chapters 5 and 6.

also via the medium of fiction, as expressed in John Buchan's *Greenmantle*,²⁸ an unashamedly anti-German, pro-imperial adventure at the apex of literature of its type. The narrative pushed in imperial settings tried to make a distinction between empires, a simple formula that read 'Britain-good; Germany-bad', and which grew in prominence as the war progressed, thanks in part to Arab Bureau efforts. As we shall see, Buchan's professional association with Sykes, and his early involvement with Wellington House, and later, in 1917, as Lieutenant-Colonel Buchan, head of the newly established Department of Information, is just one obvious example of the connections that existed between the propaganda activities of the Arab Bureau in Cairo and Wellington House in London,²⁹ which in terms of propaganda creation one might also choose to characterise more informally as another link between the worlds of fiction and fiction-making.

It is noted here in passing that, in addition to different types of written material, propaganda texts can also display marked differences of approach, for instance, "hiding its argumentative or manipulative nature" or "by spreading false beliefs or encouraging irrational inferences."³⁰ Both modes, and others, will be considered presently. Although limited by space, we have acknowledged the historical usage of 'propaganda' without making any anachronistic judgments, as well as hinting at certain linguistic and cultural aspects specific to the Arab Bureau's work, which in turn will allow us to connect their propaganda efforts to broader British intelligence and strategic objectives.

In the textual analysis of the Arab Bureau's Arabic outputs there will be an opportunity to explore the spectrum of truthfulness and persuasion techniques employed, which will conclude

²⁸ Buchan, *Greenmantle* (1916).

²⁹ Chapters 5 and 7.

³⁰ Quaranto and Stanley, 'Propaganda' (2021), in *Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language*, 131.

by examining how this propaganda shaped, and was shaped by, the Arab Bureau's self-asserted understanding of Arab societies. In considering Arabic propaganda materials, these ideas will be supported by examining the texts for elements such as recurring themes or narratives, linguistic choices, rhetorical strategies, cultural references, and how these are employed, and adaptations of messages for different audiences. This will reinforce the central thesis around the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's work, particularly here with regard to how they understood – or believed they understood – and engaged with local Arab cultures via their propaganda efforts.

Around the term information, the question is what, if any, substantive differences exist between this and intelligence.³¹ Such discussions are not new, with the lead here being taken from the following: “What do we mean by intelligence? How does it differ from mere information? The Chinese do not have words in their vocabulary that makes this distinction, while the French prefer to talk of resignation or ‘research’.”³² This prompts a consideration of the nature of the information gathered, i.e. is it secret or not?, rather than asking why it has been sought out, or to what ends it may be put. In this thesis information refers to raw, unprocessed data or facts available to the Arab Bureau.

The demand here is to validate identification of the Arab Bureau as an intelligence unit, rather than just another colonial information unit. From there, a proper evaluation of the two aspects under consideration in this study becomes possible, namely intelligence reporting in English, and Arabic language propaganda. Doing so supports the central thesis about the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's approach and execution of their duties. In the broadest terms, one

³¹ See Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1996), Chapter 1.

³² Andrew (2009).

ostensibly obvious component is that whereas, “Intelligence is secret, state activity to understand or influence foreign entities”,³³ information is facts or other data that are not secret.

However, such a simple, reductionist view excludes what is today referred to as ‘Open Source’ intelligence. This would be a pity, not least given the extent to which the Arab Bureau relied on the personal, pre-war insights, education, and experiences of many of its members, on solo travels or visiting family members already living and working abroad, from Tangiers to Tehran, and in Egypt and India.³⁴ Elsewhere it has been argued that intelligence has previously been defined too narrowly, as “secret intelligence” alone, which fails to incorporate elements such as the flow or exploitation of information.³⁵ That said, the view that intelligence equals information that is secret, or knowledge of the same, remains the most pervasive popular opinion.

It might be said that, unlike intelligence, information lacks comprehensive analysis or strategic context. Even if this is so, it is important to note that during the period under discussion the distinction between information and intelligence was far less clearly defined than it is today. Further, while this thesis has argued for a definition of intelligence that also includes the body responsible for collecting, interpreting, and sharing this material, information does not. How well known particular information is seems irrelevant: public availability would appear the single most salient point.

Of the four terms under discussion, innovative is probably the most amorphous and, thus, the hardest to define. By definition, innovation indicates change, so the most logical and effective

³³ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’ (2002), 21.

³⁴ See Chapter 3.

³⁵ Johnson, *Spying for Empire* (2006), 251-253.

approach is to examine Arab Bureau approaches to certain practices in order to locate evidence in support of the claim of their being innovative.³⁶ Relative innovation should also be borne in mind. Innovation does not mean, nor should it imply, the invention of entirely new methods. It might instead involve adapting existing practices in novel ways. As this thesis progresses it will consider as potentially innovative improvements or modifications to existing systems.

In the context of this thesis, innovative refers to practices, methods, or approaches employed by the Arab Bureau that represented a notable departure from standard British intelligence and colonial administrative procedures of the early twentieth century. Such innovation was evident both structurally and in practice. The Arab Bureau's organisational arrangement would not have been possible were it not for the First World War. The war also meant its membership consisted of many individuals who would have been thought odd choices for military service under normal, peacetime conditions. While not peculiar in itself, the most distinctive feature implied here is the pre-war civilian status of many individuals suddenly thrust into uniform and employed in military intelligence.³⁷ Arguably one of the most interesting aspects that resulted from this was the degree of their previous cultural engagement, and subsequent wartime role they had in enabling a convenient synergy of efforts between the wartime British administration and anti-Ottoman Arab nationalist activists in Egypt, which idea will be examined in detail later.³⁸

Another area where innovation may be identified is information gathering, and novel analytical methodologies applied to what was collected, as evidenced in the range and scope of intelligence reports found in the *Arab Bulletin*.³⁹ Distinct approaches to long and short form

³⁶ See also Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

³⁷ See Chapter 3.

³⁸ See Chapters 5 and 6.

³⁹ See Chapter 4.

propaganda are another area where we will show innovation at work, as is the Arab Bureau's place in the vanguard of adopting new technologies, including improved cryptography, wireless and intercepts, and aerial reconnaissance.⁴⁰

Approaches to a number of these fields are seen as sufficiently novel to support the claim of innovation at work. Importantly, this thesis is not arguing that these were entirely new inventions in every case but, instead, innovations that were made possible by the very novelty of the Arab Bureau's organisational structural and membership, the war, and local political realities on the ground more generally, particularly the emergence of local nationalisms, a factor that for the British lent itself to the pursuance of wartime and post-war interests. This definition is the most situationally specific under discussion, but it does provide useful backing for the broader argument around innovation. Even if building on earlier approaches and practices, Arab Bureau methods were distinct, novel, and forward-looking.

To conclude this section, it is instructive to reiterate that the Arab Bureau was operating in a professional space that intersected various tasks, including the collection of intelligence and information, and the creation and dissemination of propaganda, and that these were carried out in ways that displayed innovative approaches. The degree to which this innovation was driven by individual members of the Arab Bureau, or was instead the result of the novel setting, will be investigated throughout this thesis. Although here definitions of four terms has taken place more or less in the abstract, later chapters will encounter and engage with these in particular, practical settings.

⁴⁰ Aerial reconnaissance was particularly suited to the clear desert skies of Arabia, which space also lacked anti-aircraft defences on the other side; a stark contrast to the situation on the Western front. See Satia (2004), 288.

The historiography of First World War intelligence and propaganda studies has evolved significantly over the past century, reflecting changing academic trends, methodological approaches, and the gradual declassification of relevant documents. Although it is now more than a few years old, one extremely useful survey of the field is that produced by Larsen.⁴¹ This section will trace the development of this field, highlighting key debates, turning points, and recent trends. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, early accounts of intelligence activities were largely anecdotal or found in memoirs of key figures. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*⁴² stands out as a prime example, offering a blend of evidential history, literature, and personal insights into intelligence operations in the region, albeit a mix where it is sometimes far from clear where any one of these various categories begins or another ends. Further, these accounts often lacked critical analysis and were subject to clear bias and the limitations of personal recollection.

Official histories started emerging in the 1920s and 1930s, for instance the *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents* series,⁴³ which remain invaluable to researchers, in spite of their perhaps predictable flaws. While they provided workmanlike overviews of military operations, they often glossed over, or completely omitted, details of intelligence activities, which restrictions were doubtless put in place by the editorial team after guidance from HMG, and due to perceived ongoing security concerns. In spite of these gaps in the official histories, the impact of the war on intelligence studies and area studies cannot be overstated.

⁴¹ Larsen, 'Intelligence in the First World War' (2014), 282-302.

⁴² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926).

⁴³ *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Committee of Imperial Defence*, fortunately abbreviated to *History of the Great War*, or *British Official History*; 109 volumes produced by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, between 1915 and 1949.

The field of Intelligence Studies began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with the gradual declassification of documents from the First World War. During this period, works such as *The Codebreakers*⁴⁴ broke new ground in exploring the history of cryptography, and laid the foundations for later, more systematic studies of intelligence operations. Through the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to produce more comprehensive accounts of intelligence services, including the first scholarly overviews of British intelligence agencies, including significant coverage of the First World War period.⁴⁵ There are, of course, numerous other recent analyses around the origins of modern military intelligence, but one that in particular provides historical context for the Arab Bureau's innovations is a useful study by Finnegan,⁴⁶ while Heffernan's⁴⁷ exploration of the role of the Royal Geographical Society in intelligence gathering is highly relevant to understanding diverse intelligence sources, and further bolsters this thesis, and the idea of the Arab Bureau as an imperial epistemic community. Also of interest is Bayly's work *Empire and Information*,⁴⁸ not least because its focus on India offers a useful comparative for our own research.

The 1990s saw a shift towards what has been termed the 'cultural turn' in intelligence history, which continues in some circles to this day.⁴⁹ Scholars began to examine not just the operational aspects of intelligence work but also its cultural and social contexts. Satia's *Spies in Arabia*⁵⁰ exemplifies this approach. In addition to devoting considerable space to considerations of certain Arab Bureau activities, her approach more broadly is one that explores how cultural perceptions and orientalist attitudes shaped British intelligence practices in the Middle East

⁴⁴ Kahn, *Codebreakers* (1967).

⁴⁵ Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1987).

⁴⁶ Finnegan, 'The Origins of Modern Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance' (2009).

⁴⁷ Heffernan, 'Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence' (1996).

⁴⁸ Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1996).

⁴⁹ Willmetts, 'The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies' (2019), 800–817.

⁵⁰ Satia, *Spies in Arabia* (2008).

during the First World War. Regardless of merits or otherwise of this particular text, it is an important example of a shift in the field, away from what might strictly-speaking be considered intelligence history, instead favouring cultural approaches to broaden the field, moving away from what might have once been seen as ‘pure’, or traditional, Intelligence Studies.

Another shift in recent decades has been the increasing integration of the study of propaganda with intelligence history, particularly in the context of the First World War. Studies by Teitelbaum,⁵¹ Welch,⁵² and Messinger⁵³ have shown how closely intertwined, not to say inseparable, propaganda and intelligence operations often were, finally breaking down the former, erroneously held, opinion that the two ever existed as distinct fields. While it is one thing to hold out the possibility that, in ideal world (which this is not) intelligence and propaganda should be separate entities is an altogether different matter: the fact is that they are not now, nor were they during the period under consideration. Work by these scholars and others broke new ground, thus rendering this part of the thesis under consideration that much easier to frame our argument, in identifying innovative approaches to propaganda carried out by an intelligence unit, here the Arab Bureau. Another supporting text in the Middle Eastern context is *Setting the Desert on Fire*,⁵⁴ in which Barr explores the relationship between intelligence gathering, propaganda creation and dissemination, and military operations in the Arab Revolt, in the process demonstrating the interconnectedness of these activities, and, again, bolstering the research here under review.

⁵¹ Teitelbaum, ‘Sharifian Propaganda in WWI’ (2016).

⁵² Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War* (2000).

⁵³ Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (1992).

⁵⁴ Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire* (2006).

More recent scholarship has also focussed on the complex relationships between intelligence gathering, propaganda creation, and policy-making at this time. While Walton's⁵⁵ primary focus is the Cold War period, his work also traces the roots of British intelligence practices to the First World War, in the process highlighting how intelligence operations shaped and were shaped by broader imperial policies. Still one of the best works of its type, Sheffy's consideration of *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign*⁵⁶ was instrumental in demonstrating the critical role of intelligence in shaping military strategy in the Middle East theatre. This intersection of intelligence, propaganda, and policy-making was likewise at the heart of the Arab Bureau's operational instructions, and not infrequently in the unwritten pursuits and personal agendas of some of its membership, working as they frequently were, solely with local Arab contacts, and far from – at least in the short term – official censure.

Recent years have also seen the development of more sophisticated theoretical frameworks for analysing historical intelligence operations. The concept of the “intelligence cycle”, for instance, has been applied retrospectively to First World War operations, offering new insights into the processes of information gathering, analysis, and dissemination. As well as this, interdisciplinary approaches have gained prominence, arguably adding greater depth, and strength, to Intelligence Studies as a whole. Finally, in terms of the shifts in the field, the more recent application of network analysis to study intelligence communities, as amply demonstrated by Aiken,⁵⁷ offers new ways of understanding complex relationships within and between intelligence organisations during the First World War.

⁵⁵ Walton, *Empire of Secrets* (2013).

⁵⁶ Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign* (1998).

⁵⁷ Aiken, *Navigating Networks* (2020).

In spite of these advances, significant challenges remain in the historiography of First World War intelligence and propaganda studies. The loss of many documents through destruction, official or accidental, continues to hinder researchers. Additionally, the dominance of Western, particularly Anglo-American, perspectives in the field calls for more diverse and global approaches to studying intelligence history, and anything that can be done to encourage further work in and translation of Arabic and Ottoman Turkish archives and other sources should be supported to the fullest extent. Future research directions may include more comparative studies of intelligence practices across different fronts of the war, deeper explorations of the role of technology in shaping intelligence gathering and analysis, and further integration of non-Western perspectives on intelligence and propaganda operations.

Mention should be made in passing of the work of Welch⁵⁸ and Paddock.⁵⁹ Although neither collection has specific contributions on propaganda in the Middle East in the First World War, both editors have brought together a lively selection of essays that provide a body of research that has made a substantial contribution to the debates around propaganda in general. In terms of coverage, Wintour's⁶⁰ bibliographical record of available sources was, at the time of writing, a comprehensive inventory of literature on this period; his efforts remain of immense practical efficacy, whatever has subsequently been published.

Intelligence Studies has undergone significant evolution in recent decades, emerging as a distinct interdisciplinary area that draws on methodologies and insights from history, political science, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Increasingly recognised as a distinct academic discipline since the 1980s, helped by the establishment of dedicated journals such as

⁵⁸ Welch, *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion* (2014).

⁵⁹ Paddock (ed.) *WWI and Propaganda* (2014).

⁶⁰ Wintour, *Britain and the Great War* (2014).

Intelligence and National Security and the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*,⁶¹ which marked important milestones in the field's development. These publications have provided platforms for scholars to address the historical amnesia identified by Andrew, and to build the formal literature for which Kent advocated. The end of the Cold War led to increased academic interest in intelligence studies, as more archival materials became available and the changing global landscape prompted reassessments of intelligence practices and their historical contexts. This period of increased openness and scholarly interest has contributed significantly to addressing the gaps in historical knowledge that plagued earlier generations of researchers in this field, and which the current author is a grateful beneficiary.

In terms of new methodological approaches, the so-called 'archival turn' in Intelligence Studies is particularly significant. With the declassification of more intelligence-related documents, historians and others have been able to conduct increasingly detailed and nuanced analyses of historical intelligence operations. Declassification of materials from the First World War has been completed to such an extent that there is little likelihood of additional tranches of material emerging from that direction. Of more interest to this study are materials in Arabic, whether they reside, which remain a rich vein to be tapped. Frustratingly, even works once at the forefront of considering the importance of archives in investigating intelligence history in the twentieth century often failed to include any consideration of First World War archives.⁶²

The recent application of social network analysis to intelligence studies⁶³ has offered new ways of understanding complex relationships within and between intelligence organisations. This

⁶¹ Both established in 1986.

⁶² Hughes, Jackson, and Scott, *Exploring Intelligence Archives* (2008), an excellent work but one which starts its investigation of archives for the "early twentieth century" in 1930.

⁶³ See Wheaton and Richey 'The Potential of Social Network Analysis in Intelligence' (2014); and Koschade, 'A Social Network Analysis of Jemaah Islamiyah' (2006).

approach has been particularly useful in examining the concept of ‘intelligence communities’, and has allowed this thesis to develop the novel paradigm of ‘imperial epistemic communities’, which theoretical concept will be fully developed in Chapter Two. For now, it will suffice to say that the concept of an imperial epistemic community will prove to be a useful framework for understanding the Arab Bureau’s unique position at the intersection of intelligence gathering and knowledge production. How information flows within and between different intelligence agencies, and perhaps more importantly, those previously underappreciated synergies between the Arab Bureau and Arab nationalists and other local actors. Here too one might accommodate, in the particular context of the Arab Bureau, mention of intelligence failures, which are relevant to understanding the evolving nature of intelligence analysis and its challenges.⁶⁴ In making certain methodological choices, particular use was made of the work of Kelle, Kühberger, and Bernhard,⁶⁵ i.e. on the use of mixed-methods and triangulation designs in history research.

A key recent feature of Intelligence Studies has been the development of ever more robust theoretical frameworks, which will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two, but in which regard notice should be made here of Marrin’s work.⁶⁶ While subject to critique and refinement, the intelligence cycle model has provided a useful conceptual tool for analysing historical intelligence operations, and has been employed in this study both to appreciate procedures followed by the Arab Bureau, and in doing so to better identify and support the assertion of their innovative approach to intelligence activities. In recent years some scholars have advocated for a ‘social constructivist’ approach to intelligence studies,⁶⁷ allowing them to

⁶⁴ For instance Betts, ‘Surprise Despite Warning’ (1981).

⁶⁵ Kelle, Kühberger, and Bernhard, ‘How to use mixed-methods and triangulation designs’, in *History Education Research Journal* (2019).

⁶⁶ Marrin, ‘Improving Intelligence Studies as an Academic Discipline’ (2016).

⁶⁷ For example Gill and Phythian (2008).

emphasise the ways in which intelligence practices are shaped by cultural, social, and political contexts. Such an approach not only helps to contextualise intelligence work within broader societal trends, but also, in addressing the types of historical and cultural ignorance identified by Andrew, help us avoid falling into the same trap. This approach has obvious implications for this study, as it examines the place of the Arab Bureau in society, both the ‘domestic’, British cultural background of its members, and the ‘foreign’, Egyptian, Arab, Middle Eastern spheres in which they were living and operating.

The concept of ‘strategic culture’ has also been applied to intelligence studies,⁶⁸ for instance examining how national and organisational cultures shape intelligence gathering, analysis, and usage. As such, in the context of this research, such a framework is useful in working towards understanding those cultural factors that influenced intelligence work undertaken by the Arab Bureau. Related to this, there has been growing attention to the role of culture and identity in shaping intelligence practices. The impact of Saïd’s concept of Orientalism,⁶⁹ as applied to analysis of Western intelligence approaches to the Middle East remains alive, not least in relation to the work of Satia and others. While not without its detractors,⁷⁰ and perhaps superseded by more recent scholarship, the concept of Orientalism remains a line of inquiry that has at least a degree of relevance in examining both the context in which the Arab Bureau operated and also their ambitions.

Moreover, while some scholars already recognise the place of epistemic communities in the narrow framework of intelligence agencies and information gathering in the imperial Middle

⁶⁸ Such as Aldrich, ‘Strategic culture as a constraint’ (2017); and Duyvesteyn, ‘Intelligence and Strategic Culture’ (2011).

⁶⁹ Saïd, *Orientalism* (1978).

⁷⁰ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing* (2006).

Eastern setting,⁷¹ it is argued here that this line of enquiry has to date not gone far enough. For example, there is value to be had including locals' views, whether the upper echelons of Egyptian society, Syrian émigrés, or members of non-Arab communities, such as Jewish and Armenian merchants and others. This new model helps explain how the Arab Bureau's influence went beyond its mandate, via its own claims to specialised knowledge of the region and its peoples, regardless of the veracity of such assertions. As such, this concept is particularly apt for contextualising the Arab Bureau. As an imperial epistemic community, it combined specialised regional knowledge with intelligence gathering practices to shape both British understanding of the Middle East and the policies that grew out of this. Decisively, this framework helps explain the Arab Bureau's unique position and influence within the broader British imperial apparatus.

The approach of the centenary of the start of the First World War saw interest in the war in the Middle Eastern theatre, or theatres, rising to new heights. One obvious manifestation of this was the publication of numerous single-volume histories of the war in the region. While academically rigorous, many of these were written with notional accessibility to a wider or general readership, as opposed to a more explicitly academic readership.

Among works that touched on the Arab Bureau were, in alphabetical order by author, Coates Ulrichsen's *The First World War in the Middle East*,⁷² and Fawaz's *A Land of Aching Hearts*,⁷³ both published in 2014, alongside McMeekin's *The Ottoman Endgame*, and Rogan's *The Fall of the Ottomans*,⁷⁴ both of which were both published the following year. All these works, and

⁷¹ Professor Margaret MacMillan: author interview, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 16 February, 2017.

⁷² Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (2014).

⁷³ Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts* (2014).

⁷⁴ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans* (2015).

others,⁷⁵ provide detailed analysis of the Ottoman Empire's final years, and the transformative impact of the First World War on the Middle East more broadly. At least one author makes the argument that the Ottoman entry into the war was not inevitable, but rather the result of a series of strategic miscalculations by the Young Turk leadership.⁷⁶ The particular value of this text here is in its analysis of the Arab Revolt, which provides valuable context and background of the milieu into which the Arab Bureau stepped, and highlights the complex interplay between Ottoman attempts to maintain control, growing Arab nationalism, and European imperial ambitions. All this enhances understanding of the environment in which the Arab Bureau was conducting its intelligence and propaganda efforts.

Further evidence of the growing interest in this area can be seen in the publication of another substantial history of the war in Ottoman lands, and their connections to the major European powers-cum-wartime foes, in the shape of *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*.⁷⁷ While Johnson's *Great War and the Middle East*⁷⁸ might rightfully be added to this roster, although an admirable work it is also a strategic study, and as such presents a somewhat more specialist reading of the subject, albeit a useful addition to the specific genre of military histories, as we shall see presently.

Another important factor in discussing historical context is the regional economic and social backdrop against which the First World War unfolded. The fact of the region's integration into the global economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries goes some considerable way to elucidating the strategic importance of the region to European powers. The incorporation of economic and social perspectives more broadly are important in order to gain

⁷⁵ For instance Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate* (2016).

⁷⁶ Rogan *ibid*, 29-52.

⁷⁷ McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express* (2010).

⁷⁸ Johnson, *The Great War and the Middle East* (2016).

a more rounded understanding of the environment in which the Arab Bureau operated. Such insight can only help explain both the challenges the Arab Bureau faced and the innovative approaches to intelligence it developed in a rapidly changing Middle Eastern landscape. Although others have subsequently built on his work,⁷⁹ Owen's original contributions in this area remain highly relevant,⁸⁰ and are particularly valuable for understanding the broader socio-economic context of intelligence gathering and propaganda efforts. For instance, his analysis of the development of communication networks around this time, such as railways⁸¹ and the telegraph, provides insight into the infrastructure that both Ottoman and British intelligence services relied on.

In the case of the former, attacks against the railways were a central plank of Arab Bureau battlefield tactics. Not only did blowing up sections of the railway keep the Ottomans on their guard, forcing them to divert troops from other fronts to keep open this line of communication, which was vital to supply those remaining more southerly, Hejaz-based garrisons that had not surrendered to the Arabs, but it also gave Arab irregular forces some identifiable task to pursue; the dramatic impact of this activity provided a much-needed morale boost, and made the irregulars feel useful. As for the telegraph, such a tempting target as miles of telegraph wires and poles was not ignored by Arab forces, and which the Arab Bureau were happy to see these destroyed. The main reason for encouraging the destruction of this reliable means of communication was that the destruction of the telegraphs forced the Ottomans to rely more heavily on radio communications which, unbeknownst to their signallers, the Arab Bureau and others in British intelligence had long been intercepting.⁸²

⁷⁹ Eldem, 'Ottoman financial integration with Europe' (2005), 431-445; Pamuk, 'The Ottoman Economy in World War I' (2005), 112-36; Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (2000); and Ülker, 'Military, Finance, and Economy in the Late Ottoman Empire' (2020), 17-28.

⁸⁰ Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy* (1981).

⁸¹ For instance McMeekin (2010).

⁸² See Mohs et al.

Turning specifically to intelligence gathering and propaganda in the Middle East before the start of the war, detailing this is central not just to any subsequent understanding that may be gained about the emergence and role of the Arab Bureau, but also in pursuit of the thesis that they were a more innovative intelligence unit than has been previously understood. The pre-war era in which intelligence gathering, and the creation and dissemination of propaganda, existed was a landscape that was shaped by a complex interplay between declining Ottoman power and increasing European interests in the region. In spite of their waning influence, the Ottomans upheld sophisticated intelligence networks, which had evolved over centuries. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Ottoman state maintained a comprehensive system of political surveillance, including a network of informants which was designed to primarily focus on internal threats.

The Yıldız Palace, in what was then Constantinople, became the centre of an extensive web of informants, in itself demonstrating the Ottoman's ongoing recognition of intelligence as a crucial tool in their armoury, albeit one designed more to maintain internal imperial power in an era of increasing instability, rather than as a branch of military intelligence, with the typically external, as opposed to domestic, gaze or focus suggested by such nomenclature. From the perspective of this thesis, there are interesting parallels with Britain's own understanding of the need for investment in imperial policing in the pre-war era: contra-wise, spending on what would more properly be understood as military intelligence during the same period was not as forthcoming, as is clear in terms of the effort and expense poured into internal, imperial policing from Delhi to Dublin, in the years before 1914.⁸³

⁸³ For instance Kumar, 'Seeing like a Policeman' (2018), 131-149; O'Halpin, 'British Intelligence in Ireland, 1914-1921' (1984), 54-77; Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* (1995); Sloan, 'The British State and the Irish Rebellion of 1916' (2012), 453-494; Ullah, 'Colonial Policing and Police Administration' (2024).

At the start of the war, British military intelligence structures were in a state of transition. In London, the pre-war years had seen the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau, in 1909, which would evolve into MI5 and SIS, but as has been unambiguously stated by numerous authors, at this time these organisations were very much in their infancy, and anyway primarily focused on the perceived threat of German espionage in Britain itself. Meanwhile, in the Middle East before the war, British intelligence efforts were primarily concerned, as was just mentioned above, with ‘internal’ security in those places under British control, notably Egypt. Intelligence gathering at the time largely fell under the purview of the Foreign Office and the diplomatic corps, where consuls and other diplomatic staff acted as the primary sources of information, supplemented by networks of local informants. While extensive, this system was poorly coordinated, largely because enormous decision-making independence was handed to officials on the ground. One result of this was the frequent absence of a clear distinction between intelligence gathering and policy-making.

The Arab Bureau occupies a unique locus in the historiography of First World War intelligence. Despite its relatively short existence, the Arab Bureau has attracted significant attention, not all of it scholarly; most clearly driven more by the name T.E. Lawrence rather than being driven directly by its innovative intelligence practises and role in shaping British wartime policy in the Middle East. Even accepting this, treatment of the Arab Bureau is uneven, with certain aspects receiving more attention than others. Hamm’s⁸⁴ examination of earlier, pre-War British intelligence efforts in the Middle East, provides some useful background for the Arab Bureau’s work, as does Hughes’⁸⁵ overview of British Secret Intelligence Service history, by way of

⁸⁴ Hamm, ‘British Intelligence in the Middle East, 1898–1906’ (2014).

⁸⁵ Hughes, Murphy, and Davies, ‘The British Secret Intelligence Service, 1909–1949,’ (2011).

additional context of the Arab Bureau's place within British intelligence more broadly. While the Lawrentian spectre hovers over the Arab Bureau battlefield actions, their broader intelligence efforts over the course of the Arab Revolt have not been as thoroughly examined. An exception to this is Winstone⁸⁶ who, although his offerings are now both old and to a large extent outdated, retains a degree of value for his close attention to the role of individual Arab Bureau members in the field. A much more up to date, and ground-breaking text that identifies the work of particular Arab Bureau members hitherto ignored by scholars is Walker's highly commended *Behind the Lawrence Legend*.⁸⁷

Westrate's ground-breaking work⁸⁸ remains the most comprehensive institutional history of the Arab Bureau. His research shed light on what had previously been an intelligence agency known more by repute than through its actual day-to-day activities, an idea noted by one reviewer who said upon publication, "Until Bruce C. Westrate's perceptive book, every student of the Middle East knew of the Arab Bureau, but no one really knew what it did."⁸⁹ Although now more than 30 years old, Westrate remains particularly strong in its analysis of the Arab Bureau's bureaucratic structure and its place within the broader framework of British policy-making in the Middle East.

On the other hand, Westrate's focus on the Arab Bureau as a bureaucratic institution, rather than on its intelligence work, leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the unit's operational activities, and thus its possible effectiveness as an intelligence unit. This gap is particularly noticeable when considering the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's

⁸⁶ Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure* (1987).

⁸⁷ Walker, *Behind the Lawrence Legend* (2018).

⁸⁸ Westrate, *The Arab Bureau* (1992).

⁸⁹ Collins, review in *The American Historical Review* (1993), 1610-1611.

intelligence practices, the focus of the current study. Satia⁹⁰ adopted a radically different approach to Westrate, which resulted in a wholly different perspective, setting aside intelligence focussed research to instead examine the cultural context in which the Arab Bureau operated. As such, Satia's work is valuable in that its exploration of how cultural perceptions and Orientalist attitudes shaped British intelligence practices in the Middle East led readers and researchers in previously unexplored directions. However, like Westrate, Satia's choice of focus was not Arab Bureau intelligence operations per se.

A shift in the direction of a more intelligence-focussed approach, was initiated by another publication in the same year as Satia's. In Mohs' *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt*⁹¹ we see the first serious attempt to more accurately frame the work of the Arab Bureau in terms of its intelligence dealings. In addition, her particular focus on the role and importance of Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) was genuinely pioneering. While Mohs' work was both original and laudable, it also revealed important shortcomings. Firstly, her study ends in July 1917, with the capture of Aqaba, leaving a significant period of the Arab Bureau's wartime and post-war activities unexplored. Secondly, her study did not access the Arabic literature, either primary sources or secondary literature around the Arab Bureau and their activities. In the opinion of this author, the want of reference to Arabic materials is the more serious omission, and one shared by the other authors just discussed. Nevertheless, those contributions remain important and valuable. On the other hand, while there may be interest in other primary sources from the period, these too may only have limited utility in the particulars of our study. Here we are thinking in particular of Mousa's engaging memoir⁹² about his dealings with Lawrence and other members of the British mission.

⁹⁰ Satia, *Spies in Arabia* (2008).

⁹¹ Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt* (2008).

⁹² Mousa, *T.E. Lawrence an Arab View* (1966).

While focussed on the broader context of British intelligence in the region, Sheffy's work⁹³ remains among the most valuable, for its insights into the operational environment in which the Arab Bureau functioned, and his work is particularly useful for understanding the challenges and innovations in intelligence gathering and analysis during this period, all against the backdrop of a particular campaign.

Focussing on intelligence more broadly, rather than simply considering the work of the Arab Bureau, other writers have nevertheless made important contributions to this subject. One such is Ferris,⁹⁴ whose work on British military intelligence provides context for understanding the Arab Bureau's place within the broader intelligence apparatus as well as particular insights into the evolving nature of British intelligence during this period. Like Mohs, Ferris was an innovator in this field, with his work tracing the development of British signals intelligence, which remains highly relevant for an understanding of the broader context of intelligence evolution. Further, his arguments surrounding the limitations of British military intelligence capabilities in the region at the outbreak of war go some way to help explain the need to establish an organisation such as the Arab Bureau.

Although focussed on the decade before the outbreak of war, Hamm also provides some useful contextualisation for the shortcoming of Britain's pre-war intelligence operational capabilities in the region, wherein he rightly argues that "intelligence collection was really three separate efforts, carried out by the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Government of India".⁹⁵ In a related piece of analysis, French's research on British strategy and intelligence in the Middle

⁹³ Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign* (1998).

⁹⁴ Ferris, 'The Road to Bletchley Park' (2002).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

East offers insights into how the Arab Bureau's work fitted into larger strategic considerations,⁹⁶ a contribution that is particularly useful for understanding the tensions between different branches of the British government and military, which situation the Arab Bureau was partly created to address. Arguments that it only exacerbated this problem have been addressed by others.⁹⁷

Working along the same lines, while not focussed specifically on intelligence in the Middle East, Barr also provides useful context around British involvement during this period, in the process building an understanding of the political and diplomatic environment in which the Arab Bureau operated.⁹⁸ Here too we have available some interesting work exploring British perceptions of Islam,⁹⁹ offering as they do useful insights into the cultural context of the work of the Arab Bureau. More recently, Wagner has offered a fresh perspective on the role of intelligence in shaping British policy in the region.¹⁰⁰ This work is particularly valuable for its analysis of how intelligence gathering and analysis influenced the development of British strategic thinking about the Middle East, an idea that to some extent the present study develops. Elsewhere, Larsen¹⁰¹ provides useful additional material in the form of a particular case study; while it is true this is not an Arab Bureau-specific mission, it is one from which we can still draw useful lessons for this particular study. In addition, when discussing intelligence practices in the region, Sheffy made another valuable contribution¹⁰² in this area that should not be overlooked.

⁹⁶ Dockrill and French, 'Strategy & Intelligence' (1996).

⁹⁷ For instance, Westrate, Chapter 4.

⁹⁸ Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire* (2006); and *A Line in the Sand* (2012).

⁹⁹ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World* (2015); and Ferris, 'The Internationalism of Islam' (2009).

¹⁰⁰ Wagner, *Intelligence and the Origins of the British Middle East* (2015).

¹⁰¹ Larsen, 'British Intelligence and the 1916 Mediation Mission of Colonel Edward M. House' (2010).

¹⁰² Sheffy, 'Institutionalized Deception and Perception Reinforcement' (1990).

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in our understanding of the Arab Bureau's intelligence practices, not least their involvement in the production and circulation of Arabic language propaganda. Existing studies do not fully explore the Arab Bureau's day-to-day operational activities or its innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis, which is partly due to certain limitations in the archives. Furthermore, the Arab Bureau's Arabic language outputs, notably propaganda materials produced directly, in-house, or in collaboration with Arab partners, Egyptian and émigrés alike, have been almost entirely overlooked in the existing literature, a lacuna which this study makes efforts to cover.

The *Arab Bulletin*, the primary intelligence reporting output of the Arab Bureau, has received varying degrees of attention in the scholarly literature. However, despite its significance as a key source in the history of military intelligence in the Middle East during the First World War, comprehensive analyses of its content, significance, and innovative aspects remain limited. The publication of the entire print run of the *Arab Bulletin*,¹⁰³ as well as the supplementary *Notes on the Middle East (1919-1920)*, variously edited by Lawrence, Hogarth and other members of the Arab Bureau, made this invaluable primary source accessible to researchers. However, comprehensive analyses of its content, style, and impact remain scarce.

Returning to Westrate, his work provides an overview of the *Arab Bulletin*'s role within Arab Bureau operations, but does not offer detailed analysis of its content or impact on intelligence practices. Satia refers to the *Arab Bulletin* in her cultural analysis of British intelligence in the region but, again, does not provide in-depth examination of its contents or methods. In keeping with the thrust of her study, which is the intelligence activities of the Arab Bureau, Mohs offers a somewhat more detailed consideration of the *Arab Bulletin*, particularly in relation to its role

¹⁰³ *The Arab Bulletin: 1916-1919* (1986).

in supporting the Arab Revolt. However, as noted earlier, her analysis ends somewhat abruptly in mid-1917, leaving a significant portion of the *Arab Bulletin*'s run unexplored. Looking at Pirie-Gordon's wartime activities¹⁰⁴ Gill provides some few insights directly relevant to the Arab Bureau's intelligence gathering methods and into the production of the *Arab Bulletin*, but a more comprehensive analysis of the individuals involved in its creation, as well as any distinct or peculiar institutional approach on the part of the Arab Bureau to their intelligence reporting, and their methodologies, remains largely lacking.

While Occleshaw¹⁰⁵ is not focussed specifically on the *Arab Bulletin*, his work provides valuable context for the broader landscape of British military intelligence, and intelligence reporting at this time. As such, a more focused application of Occleshaw's approach to the specific case of the *Arab Bulletin* might yield valuable insights. There remain too significant gaps in the current understanding of the more innovative aspects of the *Arab Bulletin* as intelligence reports, as well as questions around to what extent it represented a departure from traditional intelligence reporting practices.

As well as considering the *Arab Bulletin* on its own merits, one should also be aware of the relationship between the *Arab Bulletin* and other intelligence publications of the period, such as those produced by the War Office and or Foreign Office in London. For a study of Foreign Office efforts, studies by Taylor¹⁰⁶ and Messinger¹⁰⁷ are both enlightening. One area of investigation might be how the content and style of the *Arab Bulletin* compared to these other publications: did it represent a new approach to intelligence reporting? Additionally, few studies have systematically analysed the approaches taken by those responsible for the regular

¹⁰⁴ Gill, 'Harry Pirie-Gordon' (2006).

¹⁰⁵ Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate* (1989).

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, 'The Foreign Office and British Propaganda during the First World War' (1980).

¹⁰⁷ Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (1992).

production of the *Arab Bulletin* in the context of contemporary intelligence practices. Further, the impact of the *Arab Bulletin* on policy-making and military strategy has not been fully examined. While some scholars have noted its influence, a comprehensive study of how the information and analysis it provided shaped British decision-making in the Middle East is lacking. While a comprehensive assessment is beyond the reach of the current study, these questions will be raised in a subsequent chapter.¹⁰⁸

Turning to consider work on Arabic propaganda in the First World War, to date it remains a somewhat underappreciated and neglected area, a thus regrettable gap in the existing literature. This is somewhat startling in relation to the Arab Bureau, where the production and dissemination of Arabic propaganda was central to their remit. Although Rogan's¹⁰⁹ primary focus is not the Arab Bureau, his general thoughts around propaganda efforts of various parties in the Middle East provide a number of articulate and interesting comments. An earlier but still valuable text by Sanders¹¹⁰ considers the arena of Cairo-based intelligence, and propaganda carried out by Wellington House. Moving closer to the focus of the current study, Teitelbaum¹¹¹ offers valuable insights into propaganda efforts more directly associated with the Arab Revolt, both in his close study of Sharifian propaganda and his work on the Hashemites. Elsewhere, Freitag et al¹¹² offer a study of sources on the First World War in the Arabian Peninsula, which is particularly valuable for regional context, while Bar-Yosef¹¹³ provides insights into British propaganda efforts during the Palestine Campaign, thus providing additional context for Arab Bureau propaganda activities.

¹⁰⁸ Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans* (2015).

¹¹⁰ Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War' (1975).

¹¹¹ Teitelbaum, *The Rise and Fall of the Hashemite Kingdom of Arabia* (2001).

¹¹² Freitag, Pétriat, and Strohmeier, 'World War I in the Arabian Peninsula' (2016).

¹¹³ Bar-Yosef, 'The Last Crusade?' (2001).

The relative scarcity of scholarship on Arabic propaganda in the First World War, and later conflicts, has not gone unnoticed with various scholars¹¹⁴ commenting on this fact, and implied by others.¹¹⁵ Going further than simply noting the lack, it can be argued that this gap in the literature is particularly striking given the importance of propaganda in shaping public opinion and support for the war effort. As noted, one of the most significant gaps in the literature is the total absence of any comprehensive study or analysis of *Thawrat al-Arab*, a book-length propaganda project. While this text is referenced in contemporaneous Foreign Office papers¹¹⁶ and mentioned in passing by one scholar writing in English¹¹⁷ (but none in Arabic that this researcher has identified), it has not yet been the subject of serious academic evaluation, although it forms an important part of this current study.¹¹⁸

The role of Arabic-language newspapers and periodicals in disseminating propaganda during this period is another area that requires further investigation. Works by Khalidi,¹¹⁹ Ayalon,¹²⁰ and Gorman and Monciaud's edited volume¹²¹ all offer valuable background but do not focus specifically on wartime propaganda efforts. Ayalon also provides vital context for understanding the media landscape in which the Arab Bureau operated.¹²² In the literature on propaganda efforts, and also that dealing with Arab nationalism, to which we shall return shortly, the question of audience reach and effectiveness is crucial. Ayalon's work delivers insights and directly applicable research into regional and national literacy rates at this time, a significant factor when making any attempt to consider the possible impact written propaganda might have had. These statistics are essential for moving towards an understanding the potential

¹¹⁴ Aksakal (2011); and Vaughan (2005).

¹¹⁵ Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda* (2012).

¹¹⁶ FO 141 / 817, Cairo, 2 February 1917.

¹¹⁷ Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (1993).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Khalidi, 'The Press as a Source for Modern Arab Political History' (1981), and *Palestinian Identity* (1997).

¹²⁰ Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995).

¹²¹ Gorman and Monciaud, *The Press in the Middle East and North Africa, 1850-1950* (2018).

¹²² Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995); and *The Arabic Print Revolution* (2016).

impact of propaganda materials like *Thawrat al-Arab*. This is also true, albeit perhaps in subtly different ways, when looking at propaganda outputs in more general terms.

Ayalon notes significant disparities in literacy rates between religious communities. For instance, in Egypt, in 1907, four percent of Muslims could read, compared to 10.3 percent of Copts. In Palestine, in 1931, 25 percent of Muslim males aged seven or older could read, compared to 72 percent of Arab Christian males. These figures suggest that written propaganda might have had a disproportionate impact on non-Muslim communities. Newspaper circulation figures also provide context for the reach of printed materials. In 1919, the major Egyptian dailies *al-Ahram* and *al-Muqattam* had circulations of 20,000 and 10-12,000 respectively. In the Hejaz, in 1919, the semi-weekly *al-Qibla* claimed a circulation of 5,000 per issue, although it was mostly sold abroad. While modest by today's standards, these figures represent a significant reach in a region with low overall literacy rates. This demographic and circulation data is crucial for assessing the potential impact of written propaganda efforts by the Arab Bureau and others during the war period. It suggests that while the audience for such materials was limited, it likely included influential, educated segments of the population. In discussing the Arabic press as a source, we must also include earlier work by Khalidi.

Additionally, working through this process it is possible to move towards a more rounded understanding of the thinking and intentions of the sponsors of such propaganda efforts, here of course meaning the Arab Bureau, their superiors issuing orders, and friendly collaborators, British and Arab alike. At the same time it should be noted that Ayalon's focus is not specifically wartime propaganda nor Arab Bureau activities.

Lüdke's work on Ottoman and German propaganda and intelligence operations in the First World War¹²³ offers a useful comparative perspective on propaganda efforts in the region, and puts forward a thought-provoking framework for the analysis of propaganda efforts in this period that can be utilised in thinking about contemporaneous Arab Bureau activities. A fascinating recent addition¹²⁴ to this literature are the translated diaries, selected official reports, and other writings of a senior Middle East-based German diplomat, intelligence officer, and propagandist, Curt Prüfer.¹²⁵ Unlike other works highlighted thus far, as well as numerous seemingly mundane jottings on a host of quotidian duties Prüfer's work shows him thinking and writing directly about what Britain and its allies might be plotting, or were actually doing, and so provides fascinating fly on the opposite wall observations about intelligence work carried out by another foreign power in the Ottoman empire.

The position of the Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts within the literature on the First World War is also worth noting. Unlike other propaganda efforts of the time, the close integration of Arab Bureau intelligence gathering and analysis functions with its propaganda duties represents an innovative approach in itself, one that has not been fully explored in the existing literature. While the methodological challenges of analysing historical propaganda, particularly in a cross-cultural context, represent another gap in the literature, here it might simply be noted that this study draws on both venerable and contemporary texts, from Lasswell to Jowett and O'Donnell,¹²⁶ in tackling such methodological challenges. Further, while their application to Arabic-language materials remains limited, these texts and others consulted provide valuable frameworks for the wider task of propaganda analysis.

¹²³ Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany* (2005).

¹²⁴ Translation by Kevin Morrow.

¹²⁵ Prüfer's *Germany's Covert War in the Middle East* (2018).

¹²⁶ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927).

Scholarship on Arab nationalism and the Arab Revolt is extensive. Indeed, available sources are so numerous that this requires application of great discernment in order to select the most apt sources, while rejecting those which do not fit precisely the needs of the current study. That said, the intersection of the scholarship on Arab nationalism with Intelligence Studies, particularly in relation to the Arab Bureau, remains underexplored, and thus the most pertinent materials are somewhat more manageable.

Considering some of what might be considered foundational works on Arab nationalism, while Antonius¹²⁷ and Hourani¹²⁸ provide essential context around the ideological landscape in which the Arab Bureau operated neither work directly addresses the role of intelligence agencies in shaping or responding to nationalist movements. In the case of Antonius, as we will see presently, his work has additional value in that he at least considers the specifics of the Arab Revolt, the larger backdrop to this study. There are a number of other older works that retain value, either as useful surveys of the area or by anthologising providing a range of important trends in the field. Even where these may have been surpassed or are in some sense outmoded, they help reveal how the field got to where it is today. This category includes works by Haim¹²⁹ and Dawn.¹³⁰ This latter work is especially crucial for understanding the political context of Arab Bureau operations. Another older but still instructive work is that produced by Karsh and Karsh,¹³¹ which at times feels as though it spawned an entire class of literature.

While the same charge could potentially be levelled against certain subsequent works tackling Arab nationalism, some of these studies have the merit of highlighting the direction in which

¹²⁷ Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (1938).

¹²⁸ Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (1962).

¹²⁹ Haim, *Arab Nationalism* (1962).

¹³⁰ Dawn, 'From Ottomanism to Arabism' (1961); and *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (1973).

¹³¹ Karsh and Karsh, 'Reflections on Arab Nationalism' (1996).

scholarship has moved over time. Here one might reference works by Gelvin,¹³² Khalidi,¹³³ Khalidi and Anderson,¹³⁴ and Tauber.¹³⁵ These offer a range of nuanced perspectives on the development of Arab nationalism, and so remain valuable for contextualising Arab Bureau activities within broader political and social movements. The field of Arab nationalism remains dynamic and fertile, with recent years producing numerous original studies, even if these do not set out to address the Arab Revolt, Arab Bureau, or intelligence activities and Arab nationalism directly. This category includes works by Dawisha,¹³⁶ Choueiri,¹³⁷ Rizk,¹³⁸ and Wien.¹³⁹

While Choueiri offers a comprehensive overview of the development of Arab nationalism, his work does not focus specifically on the role of intelligence agencies in this process. Similarly, while Dawisha provides valuable context, and Maddy-Weitzman¹⁴⁰ offers some excellent analysis and long-term perspective on the impact of the Arab Revolt, neither is specifically concerned with exploring the interactions between Arab nationalist movements and foreign intelligence units, regardless of whether these latter actually had any demonstrable hand in shaping or otherwise influencing those nationalist movements. As such, this study can safely claim that the relationship between intelligence gathering, propaganda, and the development of Arab nationalism is an area ripe for further investigation. Even when one encounters a work touching on this, such as Barr,¹⁴¹ a more comprehensive analysis of how intelligence activities shaped and were shaped by nationalist movements is necessary and overdue.

¹³² Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties* (1998).

¹³³ Khalidi, *British Policy towards Syria and Palestine* (1980).

¹³⁴ Khalidi and Anderson, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (1993).

¹³⁵ Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (1993).

¹³⁶ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (2002).

¹³⁷ Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism* (2000); 'Nationalisms in the Middle East' (2005).

¹³⁸ Rizk, *Britain and Arab Unity* (2014).

¹³⁹ Wien, *Arab Nationalism* (2017).

¹⁴⁰ Maddy-Weitzman, *A Century of Arab Politics* (2016).

¹⁴¹ Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire* (2006).

Since almost immediately after the end of the First World War, events surrounding the Arab Revolt have been the subject of numerous studies, albeit a mixed bag in terms of the value of their scholarship. More recently, Karsh and Karsh¹⁴² provided a useful, if not disinterested, overview of the Arab Revolt and its wider impact on the region, some of which relates directly to the work of the Arab Bureau. Tauber's work, particularly *The Arab Movements in World War I*,¹⁴³ was of inestimable use to this current study, not least as the sole secondary source to directly reference *Thawrat al-Arab*. Analysis of *Thawrat al-Arab* and its significance in the literature represents a particularly notable gap, offering as it does a unique perspective on how British intelligence sought to shape Arab nationalist narratives. A thorough examination of this text and its place in the broader context of Arab nationalist literature comes later in this study,¹⁴⁴ and provides new and valuable insights into the intersection of intelligence activities and nationalist movements.

Tauber also provides a number of valuable insights into the various Arab nationalist movements during this period which were not found elsewhere in the scholarship. In spite of these strengths, Tauber's focus was not specifically on the role of intelligence in shaping these movements. In a not dissimilar vein the work of Kayali¹⁴⁵ proved useful in development of arguments around the Arab movements with whom the Arab Bureau established connections, and with whom they worked during the war. Also here one might reference Eldar's¹⁴⁶ work, as representative of studies examining French policy towards Sharif Hussein, providing a

¹⁴² Karsh and Karsh, *Empires of the Sand* (2001).

¹⁴³ Tauber, *Arab Movements in World War I* (1993).

¹⁴⁴ Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁵ Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks* (1997).

¹⁴⁶ Eldar, 'French Policy Towards Husayn, Sharif of Mecca' (1990).

comparative perspective to British approaches that, although largely beyond the scope of this study does nevertheless play into our accounting of Arab Bureau written outputs.¹⁴⁷

Owen provides another useful study comparing British and French intelligence in their Middle Eastern empires, one which provides valuable context for Arab Bureau operations.¹⁴⁸ Here one might also mention Rogan's¹⁴⁹ entirely appropriate exploration of the concept of jihad during the First World War, offering as it does insights into the religious and political milieu in which the Arab Revolt played out.

Regarding local responses to the Arab Revolt, scholarly perspectives on this have evolved over time, as has the interpretation of Arab Bureau activities and innovatory approaches. For example, having used the archives to identify that the Arab Bureau was more engaged with diverse segments of Middle Eastern society than was previously understood, additional support for this idea in current scholarly debates can be located if we return to Gelvin and his emphasis on popular movements.¹⁵⁰ A related category of literature is first-hand primary sources, here referring to diaries, memoirs, and other personal contemporaneous accounts, as opposed to official archives. A number of such first-hand records have been published in recent decades. Among these, one of the most pertinent for this thesis is by Jafar al-Askari.¹⁵¹ From the Ottoman side, and so of comparative interest rather than immediate, direct application, one should mention *The Commander*,¹⁵² *The Circassian*,¹⁵³ and the *Year of the Locust*.¹⁵⁴ Although

¹⁴⁷ Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁸ Owen, 'British and French Intelligence in their Modern Middle Eastern Empires' (2009).

¹⁴⁹ Rogan, 'Rival Jihads' (2016).

¹⁵⁰ Gelvin, *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Al-Askari, *A Soldier's Story* (2003).

¹⁵² Parsons, *The Commander* (2016).

¹⁵³ Fortna, *The Circassian* (2016).

¹⁵⁴ Tamari (ed.), *Year of the Locust* (2011).

a secondary work, Philipp's volume on Jurji Zaidan¹⁵⁵ proved most useful in making connections between that individual and others working for the Arab nationalist cause.

Although more directly tackling British imperialism, Paris¹⁵⁶ devotes considerable attention to the aspirations, plans, concerns, and disappointments of Arab notables against a backdrop of British duplicity. In this setting, the fact that after more than a year of war British authorities were prepared to say one thing and have altogether different intentions must be seen as explicable without having to weigh it as defensible or otherwise. As such, Paris is a useful counterweight to works dealing explicitly with wartime Arab nationalism and during post-war negotiations, to the extent that these featured opinions that emerged from some of those employed by the Arab Bureau.¹⁵⁷

The current state of scholarship on the Arab Bureau, while substantial, reveals several significant gaps and opportunities for further research. This section highlights these areas, demonstrating the potential for new insights and interpretations to enhance understanding of the Arab Bureau's role and impact.

The most notable lacuna to date is any serious academic evaluation of Arabic language propaganda produced, commissioned, co-created, or distributed by the Arab Bureau. This significant gap is directly addressed by this thesis, particularly through an analysis of *Thawrat al-Arab*¹⁵⁸ and other Arabic language materials.¹⁵⁹ The lack of comprehensive studies on the Arab Bureau's written outputs more generally is another prominent gap in the existing

¹⁵⁵ Philipp, *Jurji Zaidan and the Foundations of Arab Nationalism* (2014).

¹⁵⁶ Paris, *In Defence of Britain's Middle East Empire* (2016).

¹⁵⁷ Paris, 'British Middle East Policy-Making After the First World War (1998), 773-793; *Britain, the Hashemites, and Arab Rule* (2003).

¹⁵⁸ Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁹ Chapter 6.

literature. Most existing studies, such as Westrate's seminal work, focus primarily on either bureaucratic features of the Arab Bureau or policy implications of their activities, rather than its day-to-day operational activities. This leaves a rich area for exploration, particularly in how the Arab Bureau adapted its intelligence gathering techniques to the unique challenges presented in the Middle Eastern theatre.

Another notable gap is the limited integration of perspectives from Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies. There is a noticeable divide between these two fields in the existing literature, which this current study has been designed in part to help bridge. This presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary research that combines methodologies and insights from both fields. Connections between Arab Bureau activities and the development of Arab nationalism remains largely unexplored, even if these simply explore the role of the former in enabling a synergy of efforts in the direction of the Arab nationalist cause. While scholars have extensively studied the political dimensions of Arab nationalism, the role of intelligence activities in shaping or otherwise enabling nationalist discourse has been largely overlooked. As such, there exists a significant opportunity to reassess the Arab Bureau's indirect impacts, particularly in how its intelligence gathering and dissemination may have influenced perceptions of Arab identity and unity.

The Arab Revolt, while extensively studied from military and political perspectives, offers potential for new interpretations through the lens of intelligence history. There is significant potential to reframe the narrative of the Arab Revolt by examining how intelligence gathering and analysis shaped strategic decisions. The impact of former Arab Bureau members on post-war Middle East policy after 1920, following its dissolution, is another area ripe for

reassessment, perhaps tracing the Arab Bureau's legacy in various post-war institutions, examining how its practices and personnel influenced later Middle East policy.

The concept of the imperial epistemic community – to be discussed more fully in Chapter Two – offers a new theoretical lens through which to examine the Arab Bureau. Most existing studies use traditional intelligence or diplomatic history frameworks, leaving a gap in applying modern theoretical concepts to Arab Bureau activities.

Finally, a significant limitation in the existing literature is the reliance on primarily English-language sources. This has led to an unavoidable bias towards the British perspective in many studies of the Arab Bureau and its activities but also to activity in the region more generally. There is a pressing need for more research that incorporates Arabic sources, both to provide a more balanced view and to uncover new insights that almost certainly cannot be gleaned by reliance on the British archival record alone. Predictably, this presents challenges in terms of access to materials and the need for specialised linguistic and cultural knowledge to interpret these sources accurately.

In conclusion, while the existing scholarship on the Arab Bureau is substantial, there remain significant opportunities for new research. By addressing these gaps – from exploring other Arab Bureau practices, to integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives, and incorporating more Arabic sources – future studies can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of the Arab Bureau, and other intelligence units, in shaping British policy and operations in the Middle East during and after the First World War. Such research has the potential to not only enhance our historical understanding but also provide insights relevant to contemporary intelligence practices and Middle Eastern politics.

This literature review has provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of scholarship on the Arab Bureau, identifying gaps in existing research and establishing the theoretical and historiographical foundations for this study's subsequent analysis of the Arab Bureau's innovative approaches to intelligence work. The synthesis of key arguments and debates in the existing literature has revealed a complex and multifaceted field of study, with scholars approaching the topic from various disciplinary perspectives. This review has identified several under-explored areas, particularly at the intersection of intelligence activities, propaganda efforts, and the development of Arab nationalism.

This research is positioned to address these gaps by offering a more integrated approach, combining insights from both Intelligence and Middle East Studies. By doing so, the aim is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Arab Bureau operations and its significance in the broader context of British imperial intelligence and Middle Eastern history.

This study has significant implications for understanding the evolution of intelligence practices and their impact on nationalist movements. By examining the Arab Bureau's approaches to intelligence gathering, analysis, and propaganda creation, it is possible to gain insights into how intelligence activities shaped, and were shaped by, regional political and social dynamics. This research will contribute to multiple fields, including Intelligence Studies, Middle East Studies, and Propaganda Studies, with the interdisciplinary approach and application of the concept of an imperial epistemic community offering new ways of understanding the complex interplay between intelligence activities, cultural contexts, and political developments.

This thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter Two covers Methodological Approaches and Theoretical Framework, and includes a fuller discussion of the concept of the imperial epistemic community, selected theoretical frameworks, archival research methods, textual analysis approaches, comparative and network analysis methods, and methods for assessing the effectiveness of intelligence and propaganda outputs. All of this exists within an interdisciplinary approach drawing from both Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies.

Chapter Three deals with the Context, Establishment, and Innovative Methods of the Arab Bureau, and as such is central to the broader framework in which this study exists. This in turn provides an enhanced understanding of the parameters within which this thesis is ultimately situated.

Central to the overall approach of this thesis is the prominence given to close contact with primary research, which is the mainstay of the next three chapters. Chapter Four, Intelligence Collection & Reporting, takes the *Arab Bulletin* for its central case study, those intelligence reports which were central to its mission of coordination of intelligence reporting among diverse British departments, and which in spite of the fact that they lay at the heart of the Arab Bureau's written production in English, as a body of work remains insufficiently studied qua intelligence reports.

Chapters Five and Six focus on Arabic language propaganda materials with which the Arab Bureau was involved, and provides both textual analysis and an appraisal of various either newly discovered or previously neglected and underappreciated texts. Chapter Five is devoted solely to *Thawrat Al-Arab*, arguably the most significant discovery, and the single largest item of British-backed propaganda from the First World War, while Chapter Six considers a range

of other Arabic language propaganda material, from newspapers to so-called ‘Special Publications’, the latter including pamphlets, reprints of speeches and miscellaneous other items. Chapter Six concludes with a combined assessment of all Arabic propaganda materials.

Chapter Seven – Impact and Legacy – serves to bring together the rest of the thesis, provides the opportunity to more comprehensively weigh the overall findings, and delivers a more complete reassessment of the Arab Bureau, as well as suggestions for possible for future research. The Conclusion reflects the overall findings of our study and discusses the implications of these, for instance the suggestion that the Arab Bureau’s story offers insights regarding innovation and institutional memory that are of continuing relevance to contemporary intelligence organisations.

Approaching this study with an interdisciplinary lens allows us to fully appreciate the complex interplay between intelligence operations, cultural dynamics, and imperial policy-making. By integrating methodological approaches from both Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of the Arab Bureau’s innovative practices and their significance in shaping British understanding of and engagement with the region during this pivotal historical period.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY and THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The complex nature of Arab Bureau operations necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies. This chapter discusses both the methodology for synthesising these diverse fields and the theoretical framework employed. The approach taken to integrate Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies includes a comparative analysis of methodologies, whereby a systematic comparison and contrasting of research methods from both disciplines is undertaken, identifying areas of overlap and complementarity, for instance, combining document analysis techniques common in Intelligence Studies with cultural interpretation methods used of Middle East Studies. Another aspect involves cross-disciplinary source triangulation,¹⁶⁰ in an attempt to cross-reference Arab Bureau intelligence reports with contemporary Middle Eastern sources, both local Arabic language sources where available, and other official, non-Arab Bureau reporting.

Building on this, collaborative interpretation also occurs across this analysis, an approach that helps balance intelligence-focused interpretations with culturally informed readings of selected documents and data related to the Arab Bureau. For instance, incorporating insights from both fields in approaching primary sources we might consider Intelligence Studies perspectives on the structure and presentation of a particular intelligence report, while also turning to Middle East studies for insights on the cultural, political, and social context of the report's content. The application of cross-disciplinary analysis is again useful here, for example where Intelligence Studies might assess their strategic objectives and effectiveness, while Middle East Studies methods look to understand cultural resonance and impact on local populations.

¹⁶⁰ For instance, Kelle, Kühberger, and Bernhard, 'Mixed-methods and Triangulation Designs' (2019).

There is an oft-repeated claim that the Arab Bureau's understanding of local dynamics was above more typical intelligence units of the time, which it is argued is reflected in their written materials.¹⁶¹ This may or may not align with contemporary Middle East scholarship, but interrogating these various perspectives in this analysis a culturally richer, more nuanced outcomes will result, understanding that leads in turn to a richer interpretation of the historical evidence. With Arab Bureau written outputs in mind, these intelligence activities are situated within the region's broader historical narrative, considering long-term social and political trends that may have influenced Arab Bureau activities. Further, to incorporate regional expertise into this intelligence analysis, cultural mapping is used in areas where the Arab Bureau operated, identifying key social, religious, and political dynamics to provide a general backdrop for understanding the context of their intelligence reporting and propaganda. Again with written outputs in mind, in-depth analysis of the Arabic used in their propaganda materials is carried out, paying attention to dialectal variations where these occur, noting that any such cultural nuances might impact interpretation.

In analysing the interplay between propaganda and nationalist sentiments, in addition to the earlier discussion around the relationship between the Arab Bureau and local notables, this methodology includes content analysis of their propaganda productions, whether purely in-house, in cooperation with Wellington House or other British agencies, or in conjunction with Arab interlocutors. In doing so, the themes, symbols, and narratives in this propaganda are systematically analysed for elements that align with emerging nationalist ideologies. Where possible, contemporary, including near post-war, reactions to those propaganda efforts are also

¹⁶¹ For example, Andrew, *The Secret World* (2018), 528-530.

examined, looking for evidence of how these messages interacted with existing nationalist sentiments.

In order to ground the theoretical framework in historical evidence, the use of various concepts to be discussed in this chapter will guide readings of the historical record. Coupled with this, as always when applying modern theoretical concepts to the historical context, care is taken to avoid anachronistic interpretations.

Regarding the use of the novel imperial epistemic community concept, knowledge production analysis is applied to consider the processes by which the Arab Bureau both created and disseminated knowledge, paying particular attention to how different types of expertise were integrated, for instance academic, military, local, notable, and so forth. Although only partial results may be found, certain criteria are in play to assess the impact of the imperial epistemic community on intelligence practices and outcomes. This includes looking for evidence of how the community of intelligence agents shared knowledge, or how assumptions influenced decision-making processes. Where possible, these are also considered against contemporary intelligence units so that unique features of Arab Bureau practices might be identified, and which arose as a result of its functioning as an imperial epistemic community.

In implementing this interdisciplinary approach, several challenges are acknowledged, foremost of which are shortcomings in the archival record. While it might be argued that this is an advantage – the researcher not being overwhelmed by material – it also frustrates the pursuit of some intriguing avenues of investigation. Limitations in the historical record mean it is not always possible to provide sufficient detail to apply the interdisciplinary framework as thoroughly as one would like. Another challenge to remain aware of are potential biases

inherent in each disciplinary approach, and thereby to strive to maintain a balanced perspective. With regards to this last point, the application of modern theoretical concepts to historical events is especially fraught, and so particular care is taken to avoid the imposition of contemporary mores on past actors and institutions.

The aim of these methodological approaches is to provide a nuanced, contextually rich analysis of Arab Bureau operations. As such, this interdisciplinary methodology allows for an examination not only of Arab Bureau intelligence and propaganda activities but also the role played in shaping knowledge about the Middle East more broadly, and possible impacts on broader imperial practices. Researching historical intelligence operations presents unique challenges and methodological limitations, which require an approach that directly strives to maintain objectivity when analysing historical actions and decisions, while acknowledging the limitations of available sources against chosen methods, and potential biases and challenges in applying modern analytical frameworks to historical contexts.

Here we may now consider particular elements and approaches that allow this thesis to be concurrently situated in both Middle East Studies and Intelligence Studies. A brief overview of the field of Intelligence Studies will suffice to identify relevant key theories and debates, and touch on pertinent historical approaches. Intelligence Studies is an academic field that examines the process, practices, and impacts of intelligence activities, elsewhere defined as, “the study of the organisationally-based collection and analysis of information in the service of decision-making and action, in both policy and strategy.”¹⁶² This understood, its interdisciplinary nature is clear, variously incorporating elements of history and international relations, particularly in British universities, and political science and public policy,

¹⁶² Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence Theory* (2009).

predominantly among North American institutions.¹⁶³ As such, it is inherently flexible and readily able to work with other fields, such as Middle East Studies. In this case, there are numerous elements which make the marriage an especially happy one. These include portions of geographical, political, sociological, historical, linguistic, and other cultural elements.

As a distinct academic field, Intelligence Studies only emerged in the 1950s, after the Second World War and during, and unarguably to some extent because of, the Cold War. While hardly nascent, it remains a young academic field, with the advantages and disadvantages this implies. For one, intelligence history continues to evolve, with important new scholarship emerging every year. On the other hand, until recently scholars lavished enormous amounts of time and attention on Cold War and, later, Second World War intelligence. Turning to the Arab Bureau, available scholarship is more limited, although this too is changing.¹⁶⁴

In spite of the budding interest in the First World War, many theoretical constructs used in Intelligence Studies were generated, and evolved, with later historical periods in mind. As such, much of this work and its conclusions may appear anachronistic when applied to the Arab Bureau, but not always. The definition put forward by an early exponent, that Intelligence Studies was “the study of the craft of intelligence and its effects on policy, strategy, and international relations”¹⁶⁵ appears in lock step with a study of the Arab Bureau. Utilising applicable facets of Intelligence Studies in this research means it is possible to offer genuinely fresh perspectives on the Arab Bureau and its activities.

¹⁶³ Jackson and Scott, ‘Intelligence’ (2005) in Finney; and Evans and Newnham, *International Relations*.

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 1.

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, *Strategic Intelligence, volume 1* (2007).

Some broad distinguishing features of Intelligence Studies are its focus on both historical and contemporary intelligence practices, the past as this may intrude on the present, a facet that will also be confronted when evaluating the Arab Bureau. It also often examines ethical and legal implications of intelligence activities, although in different places and with different aims in mind, as per the distinctive approaches just noted for North America and Britain. This distinction carries over in those studies that consider the relationship between intelligence and policy-making. Although it might be thought redundant to restate that the Arab Bureau were rooted in a particular historical moment, it will be useful to return to this in the conclusion, to explore how past actions might be challenged or revised in light of modern intelligence practices. Intelligence Studies is also noted for the attention it devotes to studying intelligence failures as well as successes, another point of coincidence with this thesis, and its examination of the Arab Bureau and any novelty attached to its activities, successful or otherwise.

In offering an overview of Middle East Studies, one might start by noting that the volume of scholarship is exponentially larger than that in Intelligence Studies, and enjoys a lengthier pedigree. However, an important and obvious intersection is that both are interdisciplinary. Middle East Studies has been labelled a field that, “seeks to understand the region in all its complexity, taking into account its peoples, histories, cultures, languages, and politics.”¹⁶⁶ The intersection of Middle East Studies with Intelligence Studies in the context of the Arab Bureau is fascinating. The former provides both critical context for understanding intelligence gathered by the Arab Bureau, and also offers a relevant framework for discussing and contextualising the various, inevitably outdated, Orientalist opinions held by Arab Bureau members. That said, it might be said that many similar Orientalist perspectives were also present in early Middle East Studies and, pertinently, these may well have impacted the opinions of Arab Bureau

¹⁶⁶ Lockman, *Field Notes* (2016), 220.

members with pre-war academic background in or personal knowledge of the Middle East. These views would also have figured in the execution of their professional duties as intelligence officers.

If it is inevitable that in its earliest days Middle East Studies was informed by those biases and perceptions from society at large at that time, so too is the fact of its progress since the time of the Arab Bureau. The mid-twentieth century emergence of Middle East Studies as a distinct academic field saw early orientalist perspectives replaced. Again reflecting the realities of the wider world, at that time the field was often tied to Cold War strategic interests, most notably in the USA. By contrast, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, one is apt to see more critical approaches in the field, often using resources to challenge those earlier orientalist assumptions typical during the First World War. This periodicity, or shift in focus and emphasis, has previously been noted in identifying the field as, “the study of the contemporary Middle East within the context of area studies more generally.”¹⁶⁷ In terms of theoretical approaches most relevant to this paper, the foreground contains questions around Arab nationalism, and its emergence before and during the First World War. To mention in passing another element of coincidence here, both fields emphasise the importance of cultural and linguistic knowledge, a thread which runs through this thesis.

Although it has roots in earlier works,¹⁶⁸ the term “epistemic community” was only formally coined in 1992,¹⁶⁹ when it was defined as, “a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.”¹⁷⁰ In this framework, key characteristics of an

¹⁶⁷ Owen, *State, Power and Politics* (2013), 11.

¹⁶⁸ Ruggie, ‘International Responses to Technology’ (1975) 29:3, 569-70.

¹⁶⁹ Haas, ‘Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’ (1992) 46:1, 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

epistemic community include a shared set of normative and principled beliefs; communal causal beliefs; mutual notions of validity; and a common policy enterprise. Although developed to discuss international policy coordination this model that can be fruitfully applied to the Arab Bureau.

First, there is the question of shared expertise, which can easily be identified as a central trait of the Arab Bureau; second, while the Arab Bureau did not betray a monolithic world view, its members had sufficient shared beliefs, such as Britain's right to imperial holdings in the Middle East, to allow us to consider them a part of what we are calling an imperial epistemic community.¹⁷¹ Third, there exists the element of common enterprise, which is arguably the easiest element to identify given the Arab Bureau's declared missions of intelligence collection and reporting, and propaganda creation and dissemination. Finally, a fourth factor in epistemic communities that also applies to the Arab Bureau is knowledge production, which can be readily identified in the creation and sharing of specialised knowledge, for example the *Arab Bulletin*.

Our concept of the imperial epistemic community builds upon and extends existing ideas in postcolonial studies and imperial history. However, while it shares some similarities with Saïd's concept of Orientalism in its focus on knowledge production about the 'Orient', it differs in its emphasis on the practical application of this knowledge for intelligence purposes.¹⁷² Furthermore, it extends beyond the traditional understanding of epistemic communities by incorporating the power dynamics inherent in the colonial context.

¹⁷¹ *Empires of Intelligence* (2007). Although he does not use the term, Thomas's work essentially supports this concept, wherein small groups of like-minded men not only administered and policed these imperial spaces, but also were additionally united by their shared experience and a common understanding of the essential fragility, not to say illegitimacy, of their rule.

¹⁷² Saïd, *Orientalism* (1978).

While acknowledging that the application of this concept to an intelligence unit raises questions, these are not insurmountable. In terms of power dynamics, epistemic communities typically assume more horizontal networks than we find in the Arab Bureau, which operational structure was more vertical. That said, although the Arab Bureau existed in a hierarchical military structure this was less pronounced than in comparable military units, intelligence-focussed or otherwise, because although they were in uniform the majority of Arab Bureau members were not career soldiers, and thus not necessarily inculcated with a military mindset.

Such an understanding of the Arab Bureau's unique composition and social context adds depth and nuance to the concept, making it even more relevant to this analysis. Given the academic backgrounds of many Arab Bureau members it is appropriate to think of them as scholars before soldiers.¹⁷³ Inevitably, anyone with a scholarly background would apply these tools to their work, such as methods used to gather and analysis intelligence, before – or if – they ever received any formal military intelligence training, which would anyway have been partial at best. Again, with the imperial epistemic community in mind, one cannot ignore the importance of these academic networks and methodologies in informing their wartime activities, which were only later adapted for military intelligence purposes. While certain scholars already recognise the place of epistemic communities in the narrow framework of intelligence agencies and information gathering in the imperial Middle Eastern setting,¹⁷⁴ to date this line of enquiry has not gone far enough.

¹⁷³ David Hogarth is the most obvious example, but others include Gertrude Bell, T.E. Lawrence, etc.

¹⁷⁴ Professor Margaret MacMillan: author interview, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 16 February, 2017.

It must of course be accepted as inevitable that, in light of the cultural context in which it operated, the epistemic nature of Arab Bureau was shaped by imperial perspectives, which inexorably imposed limits on their understanding of local realities. On the other hand, inhabiting the elite European social and cultural milieu which they did also meant drawing on relationships with Arab elites, more often than not Cairo-based Egyptians, Lebanese, and Syrians, in the process broadening the traditional view of an epistemic community. Further, whereas more traditionally envisaged epistemic communities openly share work outputs with the broader academic or policy community, the Arab Bureau's constitution as an intelligence unit prevented such openness. In spite of this apparent contradiction we might respond that the Arab Bureau's remit meant it did in fact share its work product more widely than was traditionally the case with intelligence, and that this sharing was another inbuilt element of innovation, not to say pioneering status.

In spite of the concerns highlighted these are offset by the advantages of applying the concept of an imperial epistemic community to the Arab Bureau. Benefits include allowing an emphasis on its role in shaping British knowledge of the Middle East at that time to emerge, while also providing a framework to analyse how the Arab Bureau developed and maintained expertise. Additionally, it offers insights into how their common understanding influenced their own innovative approaches.

Hall's cultural context theory¹⁷⁵ provides a valuable framework for understanding how the Arab Bureau navigated the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Hall distinguishes between high-context cultures, which include those of the Middle East, and low-context cultures, such as Britain. In high-context cultures, communication relies heavily on implicit

¹⁷⁵ Hall, *The Silent Language* (1959).

meaning, contextual cues, and shared cultural knowledge. Meaning is often embedded in the context rather than explicitly stated. In contrast, low-context cultures tend to communicate more directly, with meaning primarily derived from the explicit content of the message.

Hall also discusses the concept of polychronic versus monochronic time orientations, where he identifies Middle Eastern cultures as tending to be more polychronic, viewing time as flexible, and emphasising relationships over schedules. This is in contrast to the west's, and thus the Arab Bureau's, more monochronic orientation, with the potential for friction this might produce, for instance in terms of planning or coordinating operations. If we accept these terms, its relevance as a theoretical framework for this study is immediately obvious. Arab Bureau members who understood these cultural differences would arguably be more successful. Those who did not appreciate, or could not develop empathy or at least tolerance for, these cultural differences were doomed to frustration. The willingness of agents in the field to fit in and adapt accordingly, operating in a high-context culture while reporting back to a low-context British military and political establishment, was an easy yardstick for measuring success or failure. This theory also provides a handy framework for understanding potential misunderstandings or conflicts that arose from these cultural disparities.

It is important to take care to avoid making inflated claims, but successful Arab Bureau staff needed to be attuned to subtle nonverbal cues, to understand social hierarchies and contextual nuances, if they were to build relationships, thereby more effectively gathering information from local sources. Misinterpretation of these high-context communication styles could lead to critical errors in intelligence assessment. Contrariwise, when reporting back to their paymasters Arab Bureau members faced the possibly challenging task of translating high-context information – say from Sherif Hussein – into a format that would be comprehensible for a low-

context audience – Allenby, for instance. In the detailed examination of the *Arab Bulletin* that follows this will be borne in mind, with consideration given to the degree to which these reports were supported by contextual explanation or, alternatively, perhaps were not, but instead delivered an oversimplified version of otherwise complex cultural dynamics.

Finally here, while Hall's high-context versus low-context cultural framework provides a useful starting point, more recent developments in cross-cultural communication theory, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions,¹⁷⁶ or the GLOBE study, offer additional perspectives. These newer models will provide further nuance to our understanding of how the Arab Bureau navigated complex cultural terrains.

Organisational theories too play a role when considering the Arab Bureau from a structural standpoint. Weber's bureaucratic theory¹⁷⁷ emphasises the rational, hierarchical structure of organisations, some of which has been addressed above. However, when applied to intelligence agencies it has the merit of directing one's attention to formal chains of command, standardised procedures, and the specialised roles that characterise such units. In the case of the Arab Bureau, bureaucratic theory helps us understand its position within the larger British intelligence apparatus. It would inevitably have an influence on their operations and written outputs, but also regarding questions of authority and accountability for a small group working in what was frequently seen, operationally-speaking, as a somewhat remote region. Developing this idea, the focus for institutional theory is how organisational structures and practices are shaped by external social and cultural pressures.¹⁷⁸ Again, this is an ideal vehicle for thinking

¹⁷⁶ <https://geerthofstede.com/>

¹⁷⁷ Weber, *Economy and Society* (1978).

¹⁷⁸ Scott and Meyer, *Institutional Environments* (1994).

about how the Arab Bureau was influenced by broader societal norms, political expectations, and the institutional environment of British colonial administration.

The introduction of the imperial epistemic community also emphasises the shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape behaviour in a group, a perspective that is particularly valuable when analysing the internal dynamics of the Arab Bureau. This helps us understand not only the Arab Bureau's unique makeup, influenced as it was by such factors as the backgrounds of its personnel and its operating environment, but also how this impacted their approach to everything they did. Taken together, these theories provide a framework for seeing the Arab Bureau not just as a historical entity, but as a complex organisation operating within specific institutional and cultural contexts.

Although we have been arguing for the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's approach to intelligence and propaganda, we might also apply it to organisation itself. A compelling theory that allows us to advance this idea is Christensen's disruptive innovation concept.¹⁷⁹ Although developed in the context of business and technology, its principles can be just as effectively applied to the Arab Bureau, allowing us to appreciate how they disrupted traditional intelligence gathering and analysis methods. In essence, disruptive innovation theory posits that new arrivals may challenge established incumbents by offering simpler or more convenient alternatives that appeal to overlooked segments of business. In the case of the Arab Bureau, they can be viewed as a disruptive force within the broader British intelligence apparatus, one operating in a complex and, for the British, unfamiliar environment. This forced them to develop new methods of working, better-suited to the environment in which they were situated.

¹⁷⁹ Christensen, *Clayton M. Christensen Reader* (2016).

For instance, the Arab Bureau relied heavily on local sources and cultural understanding, or at least cognisance of cultural difference, in the process developing procedures and approaches that proved more effective in that setting.

In military settings, innovation may initially be viewed with suspicion by the high command, here the established intelligence community. Accordingly, as Christensen's theory has it, established organisations find the adoption of innovations disruptive. This theory might help explain resistance or scepticism of more traditional elements of British military and intelligence leadership. But if these innovations result in success then objections typically disappear. This idea will be revisited later, when considering the long-term impact of Arab Bureau innovations.¹⁸⁰ At that point this framework may help us identify how any innovations influenced broader British intelligence practices, perhaps leading to lasting changes in British intelligence practices, reshaping post-war intelligence gathering, analysis, and propaganda operations in the Middle East and elsewhere.

When examining the Arab Bureau's propaganda activities, several theoretical frameworks provide valuable analytical tools, especially when integrated alongside those discussed above. Although coined in 1948, Lasswell's venerable model of communication provides a foundational framework to analyse propaganda that remains both valid and apt.¹⁸¹ His formula – Who Says What In Which Channel To Whom With What Effect? – offers a structured way to examine and dissect various facets of Arab Bureau propaganda. In this model, 'Who' are the sources of propaganda, the Arab Bureau and their local intermediaries; Says 'What' is the content of the propaganda and its alignment with both British objectives and cultural

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter 7.

¹⁸¹ Lasswell, 'The Structure and Function of Communication in Society' (1948), 37-51.

sensitivities; ‘Which Channel’ tackles methods of dissemination, from leaflets to *Thawrat al-Arab*; ‘To Whom’ references the target audiences; and ‘With What Effect’ asks us to consider the impact on various audience segments, and whether or how it influenced their perceptions or actions. As this demonstrates, Lasswell’s model is useful in understanding how the Arab Bureau tailored its messages for specific audiences, both local Arab populations and British policymakers.

Another useful model is that developed by Jowett and O’Donnell.¹⁸² Building on Lasswell, they offer a more comprehensive analytical framework that examines four broad areas: objectives, audience, content, and methods. Applying this to Arab Bureau propaganda, objectives are what they aimed to achieve, primarily support and recruitment for the British cause, the Arab Revolt and the concomitant undermining of the Ottomans. Audience here equals specific Arab groups targeted with an awareness of, and ideally meeting, their needs or expectations. Content covers the messages conveyed and how they were crafted to resonate with high-context communication norms, while methods includes strategies employed to reach and persuade the audience, in part by leveraging local influencers. Clearly this is an ideal model to help a systematic analysis of Arab Bureau propaganda activities, from organisational structure to its methods of gauging effectiveness.

While both models were developed after the First World War, they can be retroactively applied with confidence in analysing Arab Bureau activities. For example, one might examine how the Arab Bureau used ‘transfer’ techniques, associating their cause with respected cultural or religious symbols, or employing ‘testimonials’ from influential local leaders to sway public opinion. Further, the application of both frameworks allows us to gain a more nuanced

¹⁸² Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2012).

understanding of its propaganda strategies, both in their appeal to Arab audiences, including tribal leaders, but also in supporting British war aims, including countering enemy propaganda efforts. As will become evident, the Arab Bureau's use of propaganda reveals not just innovative approaches but also, essentially inadvertently, a certain prowess in information warfare that benefited enormously from working with local notables, journalists and other literary elites, and which resulted in a body of work that presaged modern psychological operations. As such, this is an aspect of the Arab Bureau's work had lasting implications for intelligence practices.

The intelligence cycle model is particularly valuable in that it allows for a methodical scrutiny of their work. For example, in the planning phase, we might examine how the Arab Bureau identified intelligence requirements and allocated resources, whereas analysis of the collection phase should reveal the diverse sources and methods they employed, from wireless intercepts to human intelligence, and gathering open-source information. Processing and analysis stages are crucial for understanding how the Arab Bureau transformed raw data into intelligence reporting. The dissemination phase is less significant here, given that we are specifically looking at the Arab Bulletin reports, which were not meant to be shared beyond a select, identifiable list of personnel. Also worth mentioning is the fact that while the intelligence cycle model is less helpful when interrogating Arab Bureau propaganda operations, that facet of their work is supported by other models already discussed.

Complementing this, Kent's concept of strategic intelligence¹⁸³ places the emphasis on the importance of intelligence in informing high-level policy decisions. This framework is particularly relevant when considering the role the Arab Bureau may have played in shaping

¹⁸³ Kent, *Strategic Intelligence* (1949).

British policy in the Arab Middle East during this period. Examining intelligence outputs through this lens allows for a proper evaluation of how, or if, they fulfilled a strategic intelligence function, possibly influencing broader geopolitical strategies. This approach also helps when considering the Arab Bureau not just as collectors and interpreters of information, but as a unit that had a role in strategic decision-making. This model also considers the importance of cultural and area expertise in intelligence work, which has clear applicability to the distinctive composition and approach of the Arab Bureau.

Another worthwhile model is the target-centric intelligence approach,¹⁸⁴ which offers a perspective focussed on developing a comprehensive understanding of the intelligence target, and integrating information from multiple sources and perspectives. To demonstrate its worth we need only consider the target-centric approach in relation to Arab Bureau attempts to navigate the web of tribal allegiances, religious dynamics, and emerging nationalist sentiments in the region. As such, this model is perfectly in keeping with Arab Bureau procedures, including their synthesis of information from diverse sources in order to compose the most holistic picture of the religious, political, and cultural landscape in which they were operating.

In terms of analytical techniques, this study draws on structured analytic techniques, particularly the Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) method. While these are modern analytical tools, they can be easily and productively applied to historical intelligence assessments. For instance, retroactively applying ACH to Arab Bureau intelligence reports allows for the evaluation of the thoroughness of their analysis, and identification of potential biases or overlooked alternatives in their assessments. Such an approach helps the emergence of a nuanced and critical examination of their analytical processes and outputs. Further,

¹⁸⁴ Clark, Robert, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target-Centric Approach* (2003).

application of the ACH method allows one to reconstruct the Arab Bureau's decision-making processes and evaluate the strength of their conclusions. By systematically considering alternative hypotheses, it is possible to assess whether Arab Bureau agents were prey to confirmation bias or groupthink, or whether they demonstrated more innovative analytical rigour than would otherwise have been anticipated at that time.

This interdisciplinary approach allows not only a consideration of the technical aspects of the Arab Bureau's intelligence work but also its broader implications within the context of British imperial policy and emerging Arab nationalist movements. At the same time, the concept of the imperial epistemic community helps elucidate how the unit's unique composition, bringing together academic expertise and intelligence tradecraft, influenced its approach and impacted its effectiveness.

Having established the theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary approach underpinning this study, and the introduction of the novel concept of an imperial epistemic community, it is necessary to also delineate this study's scope and limitations. This thesis does not proffer an assessment of intra-Arab affairs during this period, nor is it primarily concerned with the impact of British actions in the region. Instead, its focus is an assessment on the intelligence activities of the Arab Bureau, without any justification or condemnation of these. The primary focus are Arab Bureau written outputs, intelligence reports in English and propaganda in Arabic, and an analysis of the same to identify innovative practices. Once this has been done a wholesale reassessment of the Arab Bureau becomes possible, more fully than has previously been possible. The geographical range of our study is concentrated on Arab Bureau activities in Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Levant. The operational scope of this thesis is twofold,

encompassing intelligence gathering, analysis, interpretation and reporting, and the methods behind and in front of the creation and dissemination of propaganda.

The methodological framework employed to analyse the Arab Bureau and its professional activities during the course of its lifespan is central to this study. As previously stated, this study argues that the Arab Bureau was a more innovative unit of military intelligence than has hitherto been either acknowledged or understood, and that this gap in the scholarship can in part be attributed to the fact that its written outputs, both intelligence reports and Arabic language propaganda, have not previously been subject to a full or sustained examination.¹⁸⁵

In approaching the subject, one ought to be aware of certain factors that will necessarily impact on the selection of methodological approaches, as well perhaps meaning the exclusion of others, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of those ultimately chosen. If, due to the nature of the beast, researching the activities of an intelligence organisation presents a specific set of challenges, then investigating historical cases provides its own, additional and unique trials. In addition to the existence of any peculiarities tied to the period of history in question, the business of intelligence is, or ought to be if it is true to its literal classification, conducted in secret. As such it may resist the sort of detailed interrogation to which one might aspire, and which in other arenas of historical enquiry may be taken for granted.

Two obvious hurdles immediately come to mind: one, the potentially sensitive nature of the material under consideration, as a result of its secret or formerly secret classification; and, two, the possibility of redaction, destruction, or continued withholding of official records, leaving

¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, Andrew says that a researcher may consider themselves lucky not to be overwhelmed by available material. Author interview: Cambridge, 5 February, 2020.

the available record so incomplete as to place it beyond any use for the historian. That said, it may be noted that mediaevalists likewise face the challenge of incomplete records, and the histories are only of elites, but they manage quite well in spite of this.

Regarding this study, the age of the materials under consideration means that reservations concerning the potentially sensitive nature of the content of the texts is moot, given that it is only considering documents that are at least 100 years old, and that the protagonists, authors and addressees, and the wider audience, are all dead: on the British side, these are the reports written for military superiors, and shared among a select group of political paymasters; for the Arabs, whether it is the back and forth communication with Arab notables, or less witting recipients of British communications in the case of propaganda materials, it all occurred in a very different Middle East and some time ago. That ripples caused by certain Arab Bureau actions or positions may still be felt in the region is a discussion that may be diverting but is also irrelevant for this study: the same can be said, on a much grander scale, of the war's outcome and the subsequent region-wide political consequences.

This study employs methods from both Intelligence and Middle East Studies, integrating traditional archival research with modern analytical techniques like network analysis. In some cases, approaches have been drawn from outside both traditions but can be effectively employed in examining the Arab Bureau's operations within their historical and cultural context.

A single example will suffice for now, namely our use of the concept of disruptive innovation; originally a Business Studies theory¹⁸⁶ that attempts to explain the phenomenon of how certain

¹⁸⁶ For instance Foster (2000), and Cooper and Schendel (1976).

innovations so radically alter conditions that they either create new markets, or so alter existing operations, so that there comes about some radical change or displacement of established firms, practices, or products. The roots of this are less important than its applicability in this case, where disruptive innovation is a most compelling framework for understanding the Arab Bureau's unconventional and ground-breaking approaches to their duties. Examining the Arab Bureau through this lens sheds new light on its operations, revealing how it challenged and transformed traditional intelligence practices of the time. This and the other methodological approaches selected as part of an interdisciplinary approach allow the most rigorous assessment of the Arab Bureau's innovative practices in intelligence gathering, analysis, and propaganda dissemination.

Whilst a solid methodological framework is critical to any thesis, in this chapter's consequent discussion of the various approaches being used it is important to also keep in mind the Arab Bureau itself, its position, role, and purpose, and the methods it employed to achieve its goals, even where explicit references are sometimes not entirely evident. This thesis argues that the Arab Bureau was a more innovative intelligence unit than has previously been acknowledged or understood.

The objectives of this thesis will be achieved through various means. While archival research forms the backbone of this study it is not the sole source of information. The archives, however, do provide access to both English and Arabic sources which illuminate Arab Bureau operations, allowing the case to be made about the Arab Bureau's being more innovative, and consequently more effective, than has hitherto been understood. Working with historical intelligence records presents specific challenges, beyond mere incomplete documentation mentioned above,

including potential bias. That said, there are strategies for tackling such obstacles, including cross-referencing techniques, source criticism, and ways of dealing with once secret and or obfuscatory texts. The limitations of archival research in intelligence history is also addressed, as are the methodology approaches that allow us to work with, if not overcome, such constraints.

This research draws upon materials from several key archives,¹⁸⁷ each offering unique insights into the Arab Bureau's activities. The National Archives in Kew,¹⁸⁸ is the primary resource, housing an extensive collection of relevant official documents around British intelligence operations from this period. The Foreign Office (FO 141 and 882 series) and Colonial Office (CO 323) files were particularly valuable, containing as they did a wealth of correspondence, reports, and internal memos directly related to Arab Bureau activities.

In the British Library, the India Office Records¹⁸⁹ (notably IOR/R 15 and L-PS 10 series) provided crucial context for understanding the tensions between the Arab Bureau and the Government of India. These records offered insights into competing visions, both of who ought to have responsibility for the conduct of the war in the region, which led to much bureaucratic jockeying for domination, and also deeper, more fundamental disagreements about approaches to the conduct of the war and British Middle East policy more generally. Here too one sees Arab Bureau efforts to navigate these institutional rivalries, albeit not always in the most considered fashion, nor necessarily always very effectively.

¹⁸⁷ See notes throughout this study and the bibliography for details.

¹⁸⁸ National Archives, Kew: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

¹⁸⁹ India Office Records, British Library: <https://bl.iro.bl.uk/collections/c3dbd611-7794-4da1-8fb4-52cb4532b64b?locale=en>

The Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's, Oxford, was also most useful. Through its holdings of the personal papers of numerous figures associated with the Arab Bureau and wider Middle Eastern affairs, their correspondence and reflections added greater nuance, perspective, and depth than would have been the case if one relied solely on official records. Collections consulted included those of Allenby,¹⁹⁰ Bell,¹⁹¹ Boyle,¹⁹² Cheetham,¹⁹³ Chirol,¹⁹⁴ Clayton,¹⁹⁵ Cox,¹⁹⁶ de Bunsen,¹⁹⁷ Deedes,¹⁹⁸ Feisal,¹⁹⁹ Hogarth,²⁰⁰ Ingrams,²⁰¹ Lawrence,²⁰² Newcombe,²⁰³ Philby,²⁰⁴ Storrs,²⁰⁵ Sykes,²⁰⁶ Wingate,²⁰⁷ and Yale.²⁰⁸

Although other archives were also accessed, the three venues explicitly noted here are sufficient to highlight the centrality of their holdings to this research. Together they provide a multifaceted view of the work of the Arab Bureau, from official documents to personal reflections, of members and critics alike.

Several additional archival series listed in the bibliography were consulted in the course of this research. These include sub-series within the India Office Records (IOR/L/MIL/5, IOR/L/MIL/15, IOR/L/MIL/17), the Air Ministry files (AIR 8 series), and certain War Office

¹⁹⁰ Edmund Allenby (1861-1936), GB165-0005.

¹⁹¹ Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), GB165-0023.

¹⁹² Harry Boyle (1863-1937), GB165-0035.

¹⁹³ Milne Cheetham (1869-1938), GB165-0055.

¹⁹⁴ Valentine Chirol (1852-1929), GB165-0056.

¹⁹⁵ Gilbert Clayton (1875-1929), GB165-0057.

¹⁹⁶ Percy Cox (1864-1937), GB165-0341.

¹⁹⁷ Maurice, de Bunsen (1852-1932), GB165-0078.

¹⁹⁸ Wyndham Deedes (1883-1956), GB165-0079.

¹⁹⁹ Emir Feisal (1885-1933), GB165-0105.

²⁰⁰ David Hogarth (1862-1927), GB165-0147.

²⁰¹ William Ingrams (1897-1973), GB165-0156.

²⁰² T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935), GB165-0177.

²⁰³ Stewart Newcombe (1878-1956), GB165-0217.

²⁰⁴ Harry Philby (1885-1960), GB165-0229.

²⁰⁵ Ronald Storrs (1881-1955), GB165-0272.

²⁰⁶ Mark Sykes (1879-1919), GB165-0275.

²⁰⁷ Ronald Wingate (1889-1978), GB165-0304.

²⁰⁸ William Yale (1887-1975), GB165-0308.

series (WO 33, WO 106). In each case, the material examined did not yield evidence of sufficient direct relevance to the specific arguments advanced in this thesis to warrant citation in the text. Their inclusion in the bibliography reflects the fact of their consultation; the absence of footnote references to them reflects the outcome of that consultation rather than any failure to examine them. This is consistent with standard archival practice in historical research, where the record of sources examined necessarily exceeds the record of sources cited.

This research encompasses a wide range of document types, each offering unique insights into Arab Bureau operations. Intelligence reports, particularly the *Arab Bulletin* series, forms a core part of this analysis, providing direct evidence of the Arab Bureau's information gathering and analytical practices. Personal correspondence between members of the Arab Bureau and other British officials offered candid perspectives on the challenges, and sometimes successes, of their work. It is important to note that in the latter category – successes – there is the need to guard against possible infelicities, from false memories, selective self-editing, or hubristic claims. At the same time, official memos and policy documents enlightened the Arab Bureau's place within the broader British intelligence apparatus and its influence on decision-making.

This research also draws on a range of Arabic language sources, including propaganda materials produced by or at the behest of the Arab Bureau, including large-scale, one-off productions, such as *Thawrat al-Arab*, regular publications, notably Arabic language newspapers such as *al-Qibla* (Mecca) and *al-Kawkab* (Cairo) and ad hoc leaflets and pamphlets, including reprints of the proclamations of Sherif Hussein, to visually richer forms of literature, pictorially-focussed communications, designed to be more immediately impactful and effective forms of persuasion.

To identify the relevant files within these vast collections, it was necessary to employ a multi-pronged approach. Before using the archives it was necessary to draw first on bibliographies from all worthwhile works about the Arab Bureau, military intelligence, British war efforts, and the early twentieth century of the Middle East more generally, including scholarship on nascent Arab Nationalism in this period. Building on this extant knowledge base of pertinent references, preliminary archival searches focused on key terms and individuals associated with the Arab Bureau – including using various spellings in Arabic and English primary sources. Differing, often contradictory, spellings of Arabic names and terms reveals its own story, concerning spelling and translation conventions of the time, the limited language knowledge of many Arab Bureau members, and the effectively non-existent linguistic knowledge base of peers and superiors outside of the region. With a deepening understanding of the Arab Bureau's operations, and identification of lesser-known figures, the search was expanded to related topics, and also tracing references in the sources, thereby identifying additional materials, in the process creating a network of interconnected sources.

Archival research on intelligence history presents unique challenges. In the case of this paper, these trials were augmented by the difficulty of searching for files that were created overseas, in a wartime, imperial setting. Over time, it became clear that many files were simply no longer extant. Further, many Arab Bureau records are incomplete with serious gaps due to a range of explicable causes, such as the sanctioned, post-war destruction and cull of materials considered sensitive.²⁰⁹ The inherently secretive nature of intelligence work, and the sometimes lackadaisical conduct and recording of wartime activities, compared to standards generally expected in peacetime, was no doubt also reflected in some secrets simply never having been

²⁰⁹ For instance, the Egyptian revolution of 1919 caused great anxiety among British officials there, and saw the destruction of innumerable files.

committed to paper. All of the above imposed limits on the ability to construct as complete a picture of certain operations or decisions as one would like. Such frustrating gaps in the archival record are unlikely to be overcome, excepting the discovery of a significant trove of previously unknown official papers, perhaps hiding in some lesser known Egyptian, Jordanian, or Saudi Arabian archive or storage unit, or else in some long-forgotten British repository in Garden City or Zamalek.²¹⁰

Several strategies were adopted to address these gaps. Where possible, multiple sources were consulted in an attempt to corroborate information, drawing on official records and personal accounts. Where direct evidence was seemingly absent, a conscious decision was made to carefully extrapolate from available information to provide what might be called most plausible assumptions; less technically, “guessing into the gaps”.²¹¹ Where this was done care was taken to explicitly indicate this, thereby leaving the reader in no doubt whether they are being presented confirmed facts or informed supposition. Further, the gaps themselves were contextualised, an approach that was both justified and helpful in considering what the absence of certain records might indicate about some aspect of Arab Bureau endeavours, or post-war, and post-Arab Bureau, attitudes towards its work and legacy.

In addition to the challenges of archival research already mentioned, given the complex and sometimes apparently contradictory nature of intelligence work, and reporting on the same, the importance of cross-referencing and verification of information cannot be underestimated, and as such are crucial to methodology. In order not to fall short in this regard, this study developed a systematic approach to corroborating key claims and events across multiple sources, a process

²¹⁰ Special thanks to Ambassador Gareth Bayley and his wife, Sara Fawcett, both for their generous hospitality at the British Embassy, Cairo, and for their assistance in locating visitors books and other ledgers from the period covered by this study.

²¹¹ Author interview with Professor Jamie Belich, Baliol College, Oxford: 15 February, 2017.

involving comparisons of official reports with personal accounts, cross-checking dates and details in different documents, and considering the reliability and potential biases of each source. When confronted with conflicting information, it was necessary to carefully weigh the credibility of each source, considering factors such as the author's position, where known, their access to information, and any possible motivating factors beyond the basic execution of professional duties. Where contradictions could not be definitively resolved, the differing accounts are laid out alongside reasoned analysis of the most likely scenario based on the available evidence.

Understanding the historical context in which documents were produced is of course essential for accurate interpretation, and as such the broader political, military, and social circumstances at the time were also evaluated. This includes understanding prevailing attitudes towards the Middle East within British policy circles, the evolving military situation, and the complex web of personal and institutional relationships both inside the Arab Bureau, and those on the outside looking in who may have exerted influence over, or were otherwise professionally concerned with, the work of the Arab Bureau.

Particular attention was paid to the perspectives and biases of a document's author. For official reports, the author's institutional role is considered, as is how this may have shaped their presentation or approach. By contrast, in considering personal accounts the individual's background, role within the Arab Bureau, and known relationships with other key figures were all examined. This approach allows a reading between the lines, thereby hopefully identifying unstated assumptions, hidden agendas, and cultural biases that might influence the content of the documents.

Contextual analysis also extends to the language used in the documents, and the need to be attentive to period-specific terminology, euphemisms, and coded language that might obscure or complicate the meaning for modern readers. Where necessary, explanations or translations of certain terms is provided to ensure accurate interpretation. Because a significant portion of this research relies on analysis of intelligence reports, propaganda materials, and other textual sources, this section details the approach taken towards textual analysis, including methods for examining English language intelligence reports and Arabic language propaganda materials. This includes a discussion of the challenges of comparative analysis across languages and cultures, and an outline of those discourse analysis techniques employed to uncover underlying themes, biases, and innovations in the Arab Bureau's written output.

In employing such exacting archival research methods the aim has been to construct a nuanced and historically grounded understanding of Arab Bureau operations. While acknowledging the limitations and challenges inherent in working with historical intelligence records, this approach seeks to extract maximum insight from available sources, providing a solid evidential basis for an analysis of the Arab Bureau's innovative practices and its significance in the broader context of First World War intelligence operations.

Analysis of intelligence reports, particularly the *Arab Bulletin*, employs a multi-faceted approach, starting with an examination of the structure of these reports, paying attention to how information is organised, prioritised, and presented. Such structural analysis helps develop an understand the Arab Bureau's analytical processes and reporting priorities. In addition, a close reading of the language used has been carried out, noting stylistic choices, technical terminology, and narrative techniques, which linguistic analysis provides us with insights around the Arab Bureau's own conceptual framework, and the different member's

understanding of, or attitudes towards, the regional dynamics on which they were reporting. Content analysis focuses on the types of information included, sources cited, where this was either possible or appropriate given the secret nature of the reports in question, and any cross-analytical conclusions drawn. Further, attempt have been made to assess the reliability and accuracy of intelligence information by cross-referencing where possible, using other contemporary sources, later historical accounts, or both. Potential biases and limitations of Arab Bureau sources and analytical methods are also taken into consideration. Drawing on the Intelligence Cycle model, a consideration of how these reports were compiled was carried out, reflecting the stages of planning, collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination. Taken together, this framework helps identify innovative practices on the part of the Arab Bureau.

The approach to examining propaganda texts in this study is informed by the propaganda analysis frameworks,²¹² particularly Lasswell's model and Jowett and O'Donnell's framework. Themes, rhetoric, and intended audience are analysed, and consideration paid to how these elements aligned with British strategic objectives and the cultural sensitivities of the target audience. Particular attention is paid to the use of cultural and religious references, and how the Arab Bureau worked to leverage local symbols and narratives in their messaging. This analysis is contextualised within the concept of the imperial epistemic community, which will assist deliberations around how the Arab Bureau's avowed understanding of Arab culture shaped their propaganda efforts. For visual propaganda materials, semiotic analysis is used to interpret symbols, imagery, and layout choices, as well as considering how visual elements complement textual messages and how they might have been, and how they were actually meant to be perceived by the intended audience.

²¹² Outlined in Chapter 1.

The comparative analysis of English and Arabic texts is crucial not only for understanding Arab Bureau cross-cultural communication strategies, but is also one of the most original and interesting aspects of this thesis, and thus deserves particular attention. This study examines how key messages and themes are translated and adapted across languages, noting any significant differences in tone, emphasis, or content. In tackling translation issues this study opts to use both literal and contextual translation methods, according to the particular circumstance, but striving in each instance to capture the nuanced meaning and cultural connotations in the original language, consciously guarding against introducing unintended authorial distortions in the process. This comparative approach is informed by Hall's cultural context theory,²¹³ which was designed to consider how one might navigate the difference between so-called high-context and low-context communication styles. For this thesis this means evaluating Arab Bureau efforts to steer a course between its own, inherently low-context – English – communication, and that of their more high-context – Arabic – local contacts, partners, interlocutors and interpreters, across all the various outputs.

A discourse analysis approach examines how language was used to construct particular narratives or perspectives around the war effort, Hussein and the Arab Revolt, and British interests in the region. Paying close attention to Arab Bureau rhetorical strategies, framing devices, and lexical choices there will appear clues to reflect the worldview and objectives of the organisation and individuals within it. Additionally, it is possible to identify underlying assumptions and ideologies by examining patterns in language use and recurring themes, as well as notable omissions or silences in the texts. In the case of the latter, as will be examined presently,²¹⁴ this is most obvious in the *Arab Bulletin's* general omission of discussions around

²¹³ Hall, *Beyond Culture* (1976).

²¹⁴ Chapter 4.

those parts of the region to which the French had laid claim or otherwise expressed an interest in a controlling stake post-war.

This analysis is contextualised within the broader framework of British imperial discourse and emerging Arab nationalist narratives of the period, notably against the background of the Arab Revolt.²¹⁵ Drawing on our original concept of the imperial epistemic community, we also examine how Arab Bureau discourses reflect, and also reinforce, shared knowledge and assumptions about the region and its peoples.

In terms of intertextual analysis, where possible attempts were made to trace connections between different texts and types of documents produced by the Arab Bureau. In doing so it was possible to examine how ideas, information, and narratives flowed between, for instance, intelligence reports, propaganda materials, and personal papers. In spite of prohibitions in military law against writing letters or keeping diary accounts that might betray anything of a military matter, whether identifiable features or broader trends, morale, disposition of armed forces and so on, this rule was most often observed in the breach. Given the personal, and thus potentially unguarded nature of such writing, such texts always hold out the potential of otherwise irretrievable insights. This approach helps one understand how intelligence, once gathered, analysed, and recorded, had the potential to inform the Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts, and vice versa. It also makes it possible to track the evolution of certain ideas and strategies over time, providing insights into shifts in wartime priorities, and thus strategies, and the Arab Bureau shifts in learning and adaptation according to circumstances.

²¹⁵ Given Sharif Hussein's almost total lack of any declared interest in Arab Nationalism before the war, one might justifiably characterise the Arab Revolt as a non-Arab Nationalist Arab Nationalist uprising.

In keeping with the concept of an imperial epistemic community, also noted are the ages, backgrounds, and personal experiences of Arab Bureau members. This includes wartime deaths of family members and friends, all of which played a part in influencing their textual constructions. This interrogation of personnel backgrounds also considers how schooling, pre-war experiences in the region and professional roles played a part in shaping their writing and analytical approaches.

Employing such diverse textual analysis methods, the aim is to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Arab Bureau's written outputs. This multi-faceted approach allows an examination not only of the content of their intelligence and propaganda materials but also the underlying assumptions, cultural dynamics, and innovative practices that shaped their production. Through this analysis, a better appreciation of the role the Arab Bureau played, stated or otherwise, in constructing and disseminating knowledge, stereotypes, and or prejudices about the region, and to assess its innovative contributions to intelligence and propaganda practices during this pivotal period in the history of the modern Middle East.

To fully appreciate the nature of Arab Bureau's operations, it is essential to consider these within the broader context of early twentieth century intelligence work. This section outlines the methodological approach for analysing Arab Bureau activities, in the process situating them within the landscape of contemporary intelligence practices. While direct comparisons with other specific units may be limited, due in part to the scarcity of comparable data, the aim is to provide a framework for understanding Arab Bureau operations as they relate to more general intelligence trends of the period. The above notwithstanding, by way of useful background, consideration is given in due course to Kitchener's pre-Arab Bureau role in so far as it impacts

the establishment and work of the Arab Bureau, notably through certain of his representatives, notably Mark Sykes.

In situating Arab Bureau operations within the broader intelligence landscape of the early twentieth century, consideration is given to a number of relevant aspects, including the general evolution of intelligence practices during this period; common organisational structures in intelligence bodies; prevalent intelligence gathering methods; and more typical relationships between intelligence units and policymakers. Such a framework allows one to highlight approaches taken by the Arab Bureau, while also acknowledging challenges in making direct comparisons across different operational contexts.

In order to properly identify and analyse organisational characteristics a multi-faceted approach is adopted. Analysing operational structures allows for an examination of the Arab Bureau's structural arrangement, chains of command, reporting lines, and decision-making processes, thereby allowing a consideration of how these relate to common practices of the time. Second, by examining intelligence gathering techniques, such as historical records, agent reports, and operational guidelines, it is possible to explore methods used by the Arab Bureau, thereby contextualising these within the broader spectrum of contemporaneous intelligence gathering practices. Third, an assessment of reporting styles and formats is proffered via an evaluation of Arab Bureau written products: reports and propaganda. These materials are considered against various criteria, for instance clarity of meaning in the text itself, depth of analysis, and whether or not there exists any identifiable relationship between the text and policy decisions. In the process of tackling this it was important to also acknowledge more general expectations for intelligence reporting at this time.

To properly appreciate the innovative nature Arab Bureau's contributions to intelligence operations, it is necessary to situate them within the landscape of early twentieth century intelligence practices, which is achieved by offering a concise survey of general intelligence practices prevalent at that time,²¹⁶ in the process highlighting dominant paradigms and accepted methodologies. Against this backdrop, it is possible to identify and analyse approaches employed by the Arab Bureau that appear to diverge from or expand upon common practices of the time. Among the more significant, and obvious, of these is their broader association with and employment of academic expertise; an emphasis on cultural and linguistic proficiency, albeit one that can be seen as falling short of an idealised goal; and the expansion of the use and type of local sources.

While this methodological approach offers valuable insights, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent challenges, including notable and widespread variations in available information and, as such, differences in the availability and reliability of historical records that will undoubtedly influence any understanding of intelligence practices across different contexts. Questions of context also apply to diverse geopolitical priorities and challenges faced by broader British military intelligence machinery across the greater Middle East at this time, and which was equally true for the Arab Bureau. As such, it is important to account for varying strategic objectives and regional focuses that shaped intelligence operations during this period.

Another area worthy of consideration are distinct cultural factors, seeing how different cultural and linguistic landscapes might impact intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities in the diverse operational settings in which the Arab Bureau was operating. Addressing these challenges explicitly aids the production of more nuanced analysis that will illuminate various

²¹⁶ See Chapter 3.

of the Arab Bureau's most notable characteristics while also acknowledging the complex and often opaque nature of intelligence work, then as now.

While this study aims to compare Arab Bureau practices with those of other intelligence units, there is the challenge of limited comparative data from the period. Addressing this means employing several strategies to contextualise Arab Bureau practices and assess relative innovativeness. These include benchmarking against general intelligence standards, so that even when direct unit-to-unit comparisons are not possible a baseline for assessing Arab Bureau approaches within the broader intelligence landscape can be established. Another method is temporal comparison, wherein an analysis of the evolution of Arab Bureau practices, using its own earlier methods as a point of comparison to obtain internal benchmarking that allows one to identify innovations and improvements over time. To this can be added outcome-based assessment, or evaluating innovations by assessing the uniqueness and effectiveness of its outputs, both intelligence reports and propaganda materials, as compared to other available information sources of the time. As mentioned elsewhere, ongoing analysis of the historical, cultural, and institutional context in which these activities took place is conducted throughout this thesis, which contextual data allows us to better understand challenges faced by the Arab Bureau, and how its responses may have represented innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis.

Through this methodological approach, a rigorous examination is offered that highlights Arab Bureau practices and innovations, situating them within the broader intelligence context. In doing so it is possible to emphasise this methodological approach to analysing Arab Bureau activities while at the same time acknowledging the limitations in making explicit comparisons, due to the scarcity of comparable data previously mentioned. Thus, while it is possible to

identify Arab Bureau innovative approaches this can be done without the need to make absolutist claims of direct superiority over any other specific units, which in itself is useful in that it permits an acknowledgement of the challenges in analysing intelligence practices across different contexts.

There also exists the need to both consider and unravel the Arab Bureau and its place within the complex web of relationships that defined it, and to consider its place within the novel concept of an imperial epistemic community. To this end, we will make use of the methodological device offered by social network analysis (SNA).²¹⁷ This methodological tool allows us one to approach the task of mapping, visualising, and analysing the numerous connections between individuals, institutions, and information flows characteristic of the Cairo-based British military intelligence landscape then operating across the Middle East.

Although rooted in the field of mid-twentieth century sociology, SNA has found increasing application in historical research, offering as it does new perspectives on past social structures and dynamics. In the case of the Arab Bureau, SNA provides a means to quantify and visualise what are often intangible networks of influence, communication, and knowledge sharing that underpin intelligence operations. Introducing principles of social network analysis, and its specific application to this historical context, makes it possible to map relationships within the imperial epistemic community; and examine methods for identifying key nodes and information flows. By employing these techniques, the aim is to shed new light on how knowledge and influence were distributed within and around the Arab Bureau.

²¹⁷ McCulloh, Armstrong, and Johnson, *Social Network Analysis* (2013).

This analysis will focus on a number of key areas, starting with mapping relationships, where key actors and institutions within the network are identified, from intelligence officers and government officials, to local informants, and Arab partners and interlocutors. Charting the connections between these allows us to better understand the structure of the broader intelligence community surrounding the Arab Bureau. Employing certain network analysis concepts also allows for the examination of the structure and dynamics of the Arab Bureau's network, including factors such as centralisation and or diffusion of members and activities, as well as the presence of subgroups or conflicting opinions within the larger network. Finally, analysing patterns of communication and reporting, or information flows allows us to trace how intelligence was gathered, analysed, and disseminated throughout the network, which process will provide insights into the Arab Bureau's operational dynamics.

However, as in other areas, when approaching this analysis it is important to be aware of its limitations. Intelligence data, historical or otherwise, is often incomplete, subject to ambiguity, or both, especially in the realm of covert operations. As such, one must be cautious in any interpretation, acknowledging knowledge gaps, where these exist, and the potential for bias in any analysis. To address the challenges of incomplete or ambiguous data a combination of archival research, cross-referencing of multiple sources, and careful extrapolation based on known patterns of interaction is employed. Where gaps in the network are identified, these areas of uncertainty are clearly indicated, ensuring transparency in both the analysis and conclusions. Despite these challenges, network analysis offers a powerful conceptual framework through which to view the Arab Bureau and its intelligence landscape. Combining these analytical methods with traditional historical analysis, the aim is to construct a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Arab Bureau's place within the imperial

epistemic community, and its role in introducing innovative practices to the field of military intelligence during this critical period in the modern Middle East.

Evaluating the effectiveness of historical intelligence operations presents unique methodological challenges. This thesis' approach to assessing Arab Bureau intelligence and propaganda efforts means developing a theoretical lens that allows the contextualisation of their practices within the broader evolution of intelligence methodologies, and providing a structured approach to identifying and evaluating innovations in intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination.

Assessing the effectiveness of the Arab Bureau's activities, focussing in particular on their written outputs, requires a multifaceted approach. For intelligence accuracy and relevance, benchmarks are established based on known historical facts and corroboration from multiple sources. Timeliness is evaluated by examining the speed of information transmission and the Arab Bureau's ability to provide actionable intelligence, although this is not an area of primary concern. Relevance is measured by alignment with British policy goals in the Middle East, and contributions to military and diplomatic decision-making.

For propaganda efforts, content analysis of materials is employed, examining themes, messaging strategies, and target audiences. The dissemination and reach of propaganda is traced by identifying distribution channels and estimating audience exposure, while effectiveness is gauged by analysing responses from target populations and examining counter-propaganda efforts by opposing forces.

As previously mentioned, the evaluation of historical intelligence operations is fraught with challenges. Incomplete or biased historical records necessitate strategies for corroborating fragmented information, while the secrecy inherent in intelligence work often means dealing with incomplete records, which in turn requires making inferences supported by any other available sources. Moreover, isolating the influence of intelligence among multiple factors in historical events is complex to say the least. One must distinguish between correlation and causation, developing techniques to attribute outcomes to specific intelligence efforts. This includes considering both immediate and delayed impacts of intelligence activities, as well as assessing ripple effects on regional dynamics and international relations. Admittedly, given this study's focus on written outputs, this is a significantly more straightforward task than might otherwise have been the case.

To address these challenges, this thesis adopts a multi-pronged approach. In assessing the accuracy of intelligence assessments, comparative analysis is conducted with contemporary accounts and subsequent historical research, thus allowing an evaluation, in the case of intelligence reports, based on accuracy, comprehensiveness, and prognostic value, where applicable. To evaluate the influence on policy and military decisions, the path taken by intelligence is traced, from collection to decision-making, analysing communication channels and reporting structures. Further, contextual analysis is conducted, of either intelligence policy shifts or alterations in avowed military strategies, correlating changes in approach with intelligence assessments. Additionally, the judicious periodic employment of counterfactual analysis is permitted, in an attempt to assess potential outcomes without Arab Bureau input.

As discussed above, to provide a suitable theoretical framework for understanding the Arab Bureau's novel approaches, the concept of disruptive innovation is applied. In the intelligence

context, disruptive innovations are adaptations of existing approaches that significantly alter traditional methods of gathering, analysing, or disseminating intelligence. Applying this to the Arab Bureau's formation and operations allows us to gain new insights into how this organisational innovation disrupted traditional intelligence gathering methods and policy-making processes. Specifically, this approach examines how the Arab Bureau's novel structure and methods challenged existing intelligence paradigms, potentially leading to both breakthroughs and blind spots in British understanding of Arab affairs. As such, applying disruptive innovation theory to historical intelligence practices offers a fresh perspective on the dynamics of institutional change and adaptation in response to complex geopolitical challenges. The Arab Bureau's integration of academic expertise, emphasis on cultural and linguistic proficiency, and innovative use of local sources are all examined through this lens.

This thesis also identifies potentially disruptive innovations by looking for novel approaches to intelligence gathering or analysis, unconventional organisational structures, or operational methods that markedly departed from established norms. The framework for analysis includes four broad areas. One, identifying areas ripe for disruption in traditional, early twentieth century, intelligence methods; two, contextualising the Arab Bureau within evolving intelligence paradigms of the time; three, evaluating the Arab Bureau's adaptability and responsiveness to changing conditions; and, four, assessing the degree of innovation in the Arab Bureau's methods compared, where possible, to contemporaneous practices.

To assess the long-term impact of these innovations, their influence on subsequent intelligence operations is traced,²¹⁸ identifying adoptions or adaptations of Arab Bureau practices by other agencies, both contemporaneous or subsequent, to examine the legacy of these innovations in

²¹⁸ See Chapter 7.

later intelligence reforms, and evaluate any enduring relevance by assessing their applicability to modern intelligence challenges and practises. Taken together, this approach allows us to place Arab Bureau innovations on a continuum of intelligence practice development, considering its role in shaping modern approaches to regional expertise and cultural intelligence.

While this methodology provides a comprehensive framework for analysis, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, some of which have already been enumerated. Both the historical remove and secretive nature of intelligence work mean that aspects of the Arab Bureau's operations remain obscure, and in all likelihood are destined to remain so. The analysis here is necessarily based on available documentation, which may be incomplete or biased. Furthermore, the application of modern theories to historical contexts requires careful consideration to avoid anachronistic interpretations. In doing so this study strives to balance contemporary theoretical insights with a nuanced understanding of the historical context in which the Arab Bureau operated. The approach to assessing the Arab Bureau's effectiveness and innovative nature combines traditional historical analysis with modern theoretical frameworks. By employing a range of analytical tools, from content analysis and case studies, to the application of disruptive innovation theory, the aim is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Arab Bureau's impact and legacy.²¹⁹

This methodology allows one to navigate the challenges of historical intelligence analysis while offering original insights into the Arab Bureau written outputs. In the process of contextualising these practices within the broader evolution of intelligence methodologies it is

²¹⁹ Chapter 7.

possible to better understand its unique contributions to the field, and its lasting influence on intelligence practices.

Building on the theoretical frameworks introduced previously, this section outlines our specific methodological approach to evaluating the Arab Bureau's propaganda activities. While Lasswell's model,²²⁰ and Jowett and O'Donnell's framework²²¹ provide the theoretical foundation, here we focus on the practical application of these theories and additional methodological tools tailored to this particular historical context. To begin an analysis of historical propaganda a rigorous contextual analysis we employed to situate Arab Bureau propaganda within a broader historical, cultural, and political landscape. Doing this involves examining contemporary geopolitical events in the round, most obviously the First World War, and the influence this had on propaganda strategies. For instance, how did the war's progress, particularly an event such as the Arab Revolt, shape the content and tone of Arab Bureau propaganda. Where possible, the socio-cultural environment of target audiences must also be considered, to include some understanding of the tribal structures, religious dynamics, and social hierarchies that influenced how propaganda messages were designed, developed, received, and interpreted.

Also integral is a consideration of the impact of emerging Arab nationalist sentiments on propaganda reception, which will lead to considering how Arab Bureau propaganda interacted with, and potentially played some part in informing or shaping, nascent Arab nationalist ideologies. Alongside this the interplay between Arab Bureau propaganda and broader British imperial policies and war aims in the region we be investigated. Doing so will build

²²⁰ Lasswell, *Propaganda* (1927), and 'Structure and Function of Communication in Society' (1948).

²²¹ Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (2012).

understanding of how propaganda efforts aligned with or diverged from official policy objectives. In further pursuit of this aim, comparative analysis methods are also utilised to evaluate Arab Bureau propaganda in relation to other British efforts in this same and other theatres of the war. Such a comparison will highlight the unique aspects of the Arab Bureau's approach.

Although not central to this thesis, where German and Ottoman propaganda in the region come into contact with the present field of study any implications this may have will be scrutinised, for instance if it enhances the more general understanding of the propaganda landscape that existed between enemies, which should also enable us to more fully assess Arab Bureau responses or counter-propaganda efforts. At the same time, space does not permit extensive analysis of enemy propaganda, and is not a goal of this thesis.²²²

In terms of 'friendly' propaganda, while comparisons with pre- and post-war outputs might be thought of as a useful comparison, given the short lifespan of the Arab Bureau a diachronic comparison is neither particularly feasible or relevant to this study. On the other hand, consideration of Arab Bureau outputs alongside Wellington House²²³ productions destined for the Arab Middle East is possible. Doing so means encountering both joint operations and some that ran in spite of opposition to Arab Bureau preferences and suggestions, as the official correspondence makes clear. However, even this provides us with a useful model, comparing

²²² For more on German and Ottoman propaganda in this period see, Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany* (2005); McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express* (2010); Schwanitz, *Germany and the Middle East* (2002); Askari, *A Soldier's Story* (2003); Erickson, *Ordered to Die* (2000); Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate* (2016); Lutz, 'Studies of World War Propaganda' (1933); McCarthy, *Ottoman Peoples* (2001); Özdemir, *Ottoman Army* (2008); and Rogan, 'Rival Jihads' (2016).

²²³ For example, Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda' (1975); Radu, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda' (2009); Taylor, 'The Foreign Office and British Propaganda' (1980); Bar-Yosef, 'The Last Crusade?' (2001); Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* (1987); Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique* (1927); and Messinger, *British Propaganda* (1992).

approaches of London-based operators with the ostensible experts based in Cairo and across the wider Middle East.

Given the importance of Arabic language propaganda, both in terms of the Arab Bureau's remit and this thesis, a close textual analysis of those materials is essential to explore both linguistic and rhetorical features. In the first instance, this involves a detailed examination of vocabulary, syntax, and stylistic choices in *Thawrat al-Arab* and other publications. Examining linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies in an attempt to fit local communication norms includes identifying persuasive techniques, such as appeals to, for instance, religion and honour, or more simple anti-Ottoman sentiment, as well as assessing their cultural appropriateness and whether or not they align with local mores.

While the desire to understand the dissemination of propaganda is understandable, the application of network analysis techniques to identify the distribution channels of propaganda materials is limited, given archival constraints. While it is possible to discover what quantities of leaflets, newspapers, and 'special publications' were sent out from Cairo or London, beyond that it is extremely challenging to identify the journey taken by these materials. As such, regrettably, it may not be possible to analyse in any depth the flow of information and ideas within target communities. Ideally one would identify precisely how propaganda messages were discussed, shared, and potentially altered, as they spread through social networks, but there are significant gaps in the available record. A more promising avenue is the identification of key Arab partners and other local intermediaries in the propaganda process. As such, an examination will be conducted into the role of local notables, religious leaders, and other influential figures in disseminating and legitimising propaganda messages.

As mentioned above in relation to intelligence reports, where appropriate this thesis will employ quantitative content analysis methods to propaganda outputs, for instance measuring the frequency of key themes and messages across different propaganda materials. In doing so it is possible to better identify core narratives and track the consistency of these over time. By the same means, it may also be possible to track shifts in propaganda content over time, possibly correlating these changes with external events or strategic pivots.

In terms of methodological challenges in evaluating Arab Bureau propaganda, there are a number of questions to consider, not least issues around translation. A discuss will take place in due course around Arab Bureau collaboration with Arab allies, and co-opting or cooperating with native Arabic speakers, in the hope of ensuring greater accuracy in interpretation, more nuanced language and culturally-specific expressions for the most effective possible messaging. Cultural engagement between the Arab Bureau and Arab notables is one interesting facet of their wartime activities, enabling as it did a convenient collaboration of efforts between the British and their Cairo-based, anti-Ottoman Arab allies. It is also possible to pursue questions around local power dynamics and their influence on propaganda reception, most notably in the case of the Arab Revolt, and various claims made by or on behalf of Sherif Hussein, e.g. how existing social and political structures mediated the impact of this propaganda.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind limited literacy rates at this time, and the attendant reduction in access to certain forms of media across all communities.²²⁴ This insight helps make

²²⁴ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995).

clear the reach and limitations of different propaganda formats, and the enhanced role of local notables in helping spread textual messaging.

Before closing this section, a note should be made about gaps in the historical record, adding that if at any point this thesis contains analysis based on limited or fragmentary evidence this is clearly stated. Where gaps exist, contextual evidence may allow for the presentation of informed inferences, as was the case with Arab Bureau intelligence reports, and any informed guesswork. While assessing impact across diverse Arab societies would be a fascinating area for a very rich and nuanced study, perhaps offering a segmentation of analysis by region, social class, or religious affiliation, thereby rejecting the heterogeneity of Arab societies and other sweeping generalisations, it is beyond the scope of this study.

Combining the above methodological approaches with the theoretical frameworks already established, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts. This methodology allows an examination not only the content and strategies of the propaganda but also its reception and impact. Such a multifaceted approach will help uncover the innovative aspects of the Arab Bureau's propaganda activities.

As previously noted, the challenges of writing intelligence history are compounded by a widespread suspicion of the field, and perhaps also the motivations of those who choosing to engage with it. An attitude of distrust towards the motives of scholars engaged in intelligence history is not uncommon, imagining them at worst undercover agents of the state, or else offering unquestioning fealty to the powers that be. In line with this view, one scholar offered the opinion that, "As many academicians prefer to denounce the existence of intelligence agencies from a distance rather than come to terms with them, the public, except for the sector

that seeks sensations, is likely to discount even accurate accounts, or to think that an author has himself been part of that community, or has compromised normal scholarly canons, in order to gain access to materials; or to think of the field as akin to writing of crime from the inside: unclean.”²²⁵ Such a perception only highlights the need for rigorous, objective analysis of intelligence activities, such as those of the Arab Bureau, in order to see the continued growth in contributions from its more legitimate proponents, which in turn will help bridge the gap between academic, and indeed public, scepticism, and the historical reality of intelligence operations.

The use of the imperial epistemic community concept presents specific practical challenges, notably limitations in available sources. This means there exists a parallel difficulty in terms of being able to fully reconstruct the Arab Bureau’s knowledge networks. Apart from directly stating these limitations, multiple sources and methods are used to triangulate information regarding these networks, doing what is possible given these restraints. Applying modern concepts to historical contexts risks anachronism, although this can be guarded against by carefully grounding analysis in contemporary documents and expressed ideas, as well as explicitly discussing where modern concepts are being applied, and justifying their use.

While this thesis posits that the Arab Bureau employed innovative practices, the potential for bias in this argument is acknowledged. To alleviate this concern, any critical perspectives regarding Arab Bureau effectiveness and methods were actively sought out, such as the opinions of their most reliable and intractable critics, viz. the Government in India, and these viewpoints have been incorporated in the analysis when justified. A comparative framework that considers the broader context of intelligence practices during this period also helps

²²⁵ Quoting Winks, in Lathrop, *Literary Spy*, 278.

distinguish truly innovative approaches from those that may simply appear novel due to limited comparative data. By maintaining this balanced approach this reassessment of the Arab Bureau remains nuanced and critically robust throughout.

The above considerations inevitably impact any understanding and presentation of the work of the Arab Bureau: this does not mean it is impossible to present balanced analysis. Indeed, it is confidently argued that this has been achieved by emphasising the complexity of historical contexts under review, thereby avoiding oversimplification. Further, by acknowledging areas of uncertainty and speculative interpretation the hope exists that it will stimulate further research and discussion in these areas. Explicitly addressing these considerations and limitations, the focus on practical considerations and their impact on the research, provides a transparent account of the ethical and methodological challenges faced in this study.

When working with Arabic language materials, particularly propaganda texts, several methodological challenges emerge that require careful consideration. Translation issues are paramount, as capturing the nuanced meanings, cultural connotations, and rhetorical devices in the original Arabic requires not just linguistic fluency but cultural understanding. This thesis employs both literal and contextual translation approaches, depending on the specific requirements of the analysis, while acknowledging the inevitable compromises involved in cross-linguistic interpretation.

The high-context nature of Arabic communication, as discussed through Hall's cultural context theory, presents particular challenges when analysing how Arabic propaganda might have been received by its intended audience. Understanding the cultural references, religious allusions, and implicit meanings requires contextualisation within the socio-political landscape of the

time. Where possible, this study draws on contemporary Arabic responses to propaganda materials, though these are admittedly limited.

A significant challenge involves the interpretation of cultural and religious elements in propaganda texts. The Arab Bureau's propaganda often employed Islamic references and appeals to Arab cultural values, which requires careful analysis of how these elements were deployed and potentially received. This analysis must acknowledge both the intended meanings from the British perspective and how these might have been interpreted by Arab audiences with varying levels of religious knowledge and cultural backgrounds.

Researching historical intelligence operations presents unique ethical challenges. While the historical distance of a little more than a century mitigates many of the concerns associated with more recent intelligence activities, there remain important considerations regarding how to approach sensitive historical material and the representation of individuals and communities.

This research acknowledges the imperial context in which the Arab Bureau operated, recognising the power dynamics and cultural assumptions inherent in British intelligence operations in the Middle East. While the focus is on analysing the innovative nature of their practices rather than passing moral judgment, the thesis maintains awareness of the broader ethical implications of imperial intelligence activities.

In presenting and analysing propaganda materials, particularly those that employed religious appeals or cultural stereotypes, care is taken to contextualise these within the historical period without reproducing potentially problematic characterisations. The analysis aims to understand

how these materials functioned as tools of persuasion while acknowledging the ethical dimensions of such cultural appropriation.

The research also considers the ethical implications of how knowledge about Arab societies was produced and circulated through intelligence channels, particularly through the lens of the imperial epistemic community concept. This involves examining how certain types of knowledge were privileged over others and how intelligence gathering contributed to broader patterns of imperial knowledge production.

This chapter has outlined an innovative methodological framework for analysing Arab Bureau operations and intelligence practices in the Arab Middle East. By integrating approaches from Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, a robust interdisciplinary methodology has been developed that allows for a nuanced examination of Arab Bureau activities within their proper historical and cultural context.

Central to this approach is the novel application of the imperial epistemic community concept, which provides a unique lens through which to consider and more comprehensively appreciate the Arab Bureau's role in knowledge production and dissemination. This framework, combined with those methods employed to analyse intelligence reports and propaganda materials, facilitates an exploration of the Arab Bureau's intelligence and propaganda activities in new and unprecedented depth.

Subsequent chapters will apply these methods to examine the *Arab Bulletin*, and *Thawrat al-Arab* and other Arabic materials, using the integrated approach discussed to uncover new insights into Arab Bureau operations and the broader implications of these. The chosen

methodology supports this thesis by providing tools to identify and analyse innovative practices within their historical context. While this approach offers significant strengths in its interdisciplinary nature and ability to bridge cultural and historical divides, potential limitations have been acknowledged, particularly in reconstructing historical knowledge networks and navigating ethical considerations in intelligence history research. Nevertheless, this methodological framework represents a significant step forward in the study of historical intelligence operations, offering a useful template for future research in this field.

CHAPTER 3 – CONTEXT, ESTABLISHMENT, and INNOVATIVE METHODS

Having identified gaps in existing scholarship it is time to examine the historical context and establishment of this unique intelligence unit. Context is crucial for understanding how the Arab Bureau's innovative approaches emerged from specific historical circumstances, and thus demonstrating how they represented a novel approach to British intelligence gathering and analysis in the Middle East during the First World War. This chapter examines the setting that necessitated its creation, the process of its establishment, and the innovative methods it employed in pursuit of British interests in the region.

The period after 1914 was marked by rapid geopolitical shifts across the Middle East and North Africa.²²⁶ The Ottoman empire's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers transformed the region into a critical theatre of the world war, posing both challenges and opportunities for British imperial interests: while some question this view, that the region was a critical theatre in the war, this thesis argues that importance of the Suez Canal alone makes this so. The Arab Bureau appeared as a response to this complex situation, where traditional intelligence-gathering methods were proving inadequate, and official anti-Ottoman propaganda was a new phenomenon. Its formation reflected a growing recognition among British officials that effective intelligence work required specialised knowledge and understanding that went beyond conventional military intelligence.

This chapter argues that the Arab Bureau's innovative nature stemmed from its unique composition and its attempts to bridge the gap between military intelligence, influence

²²⁶ See Johnson and Kitchen (2019).

operations, and political decision-making. As Herman notes,²²⁷ intelligence services of this period typically imagined that one could organise knowledge of foreign countries in segmentary fashion, rather than as a unified whole. Arab Bureau efforts to develop more comprehensive approaches to regional intelligence anticipated later developments in intelligence practices. By examining the context, creation, and methods of the Arab Bureau, we can gain insights into how British intelligence practices adapted to the challenges of wartime operations in a culturally distinct and strategically vital region. Further, and arguably of even greater importance, was the region's political importance, wherein Britain (and indeed France) had to ensure that its Muslim subjects remained loyal to the empire; this had to be set against nascent, and volatile ideas of nationalism, which although keen to embrace and second, could also turn against Britain, or any other empire.

The chapter will provide the historical context that led to the Arab Bureau's creation, including the strategic importance of the Middle East to the Allied powers, and the evolving British policy towards the region. It will then detail the process of the Arab Bureau's establishment, highlighting key figures involved, and the new agency's initial objectives. Finally, it will introduce some of the innovative approaches adopted by the Arab Bureau, setting the stage for more detailed analysis in subsequent chapters. Taken together this will develop an understanding that not only did Britain want insights – intelligence – about what was taking place, but also was desirous of having an influence – propaganda – over the Arabs and others of the region. In short, the creation of the Arab Bureau was more than just the routine setting up of a new bureaucracy; it was existential to the Empire, and came out of Britain's experience of colonial systems.

²²⁷ Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (1996).

Before examining the immediate context of the Arab Bureau's creation, we must recognise the influence of Lord Kitchener's legacy on both its formation and operational culture. As British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt (1911–1914) and previously as Sirdar of the Egyptian Army and Governor-General of the Sudan (1896–1899), Kitchener had established a distinctively personal approach to imperial administration that would leave its mark on the region's intelligence apparatus. His influence helps explain the prominence of "Sudan / Egypt hands" in the formation of the Arab Bureau and accounts for what might otherwise appear as eccentric initiatives by figures like Mark Sykes.

Kitchener's legacy in Egypt and Sudan can be seen in several important dimensions. First, he developed an administrative system that tended to rely heavily on personal networks and direct relationships rather than formal bureaucratic structures. This approach, which emphasised practical knowledge over procedural correctness, would later influence the Arab Bureau's preference for flexibility and personal initiative. Second, Kitchener cultivated a particular group of officers and administrators around him who shared his views on regional policy and administration. Many of these 'Kitchener men' would go on to staff or support the Arab Bureau. Third, Kitchener promoted a view of the Anglo-Arab relationship that was distinct from the Anglo-Indian model, seeing Arab populations as potential partners rather than simply subjects.

As Kedourie has demonstrated,²²⁸ Kitchener's period of service in the Sudan created a particular disposition among British officials that fundamentally shaped their attitudes toward Arabs and Turks. This 'Sudan attitude' represented a blending of pragmatic administrative concerns with a, some might say, romantic attachment to the desert and its inhabitants. In his work on British imperialism, Johnson has described this outlook as a "desert romanticism that

²²⁸ Kedourie, 'Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question', *The Historical Journal* (1964), 7:2, 280–297.

combined with practical administrative competence,”²²⁹ creating a cadre of officials who approached their duties with both enthusiasm and a sense of personal connection to the region and its peoples.

The most significant carrier of this Kitchener legacy was Reginald Wingate, who succeeded Kitchener as both Sirdar and Governor-General of Sudan. Wingate embodied the transition from Kitchener’s more autocratic style to a more systematised approach to administration and intelligence.²³⁰ Under his guidance, the Sudan Political Service and the Sudan Intelligence Department developed methods of information gathering and analysis that would later influence the Arab Bureau’s practices.

As Kedourie points out, service in the Sudan created a particular disposition among British officials that fundamentally shaped their attitudes toward Arabs and Turks.²³¹ Sir Reginald Wingate, Kitchener’s successor as Sirdar and Governor-General of Sudan, exemplified this when he explained to Lord Stamfordham, in September 1915, why he had come to “push the future Arab Union for all it is worth”: “I had to govern a country in which the very name of ‘Turk’ stinks in the nostrils of the people. They have been ground under the heel of the Turk and Egyptian (to them the names are synonymous) and were in close proximity to the Arabs of Arabia, who entertain very similar feelings to their own in regard to their Turkish masters. For these reasons, I—who so warmly supported the Turk on utilitarian grounds—now espoused the Arab cause with still greater warmth and with more real sympathy.”²³²

²²⁹ Johnson, *British Imperialism* (2003).

²³⁰ Lieshout, “ ‘Keeping Better Educated Moslems Busy’ ” (1984).

²³¹ Kedourie, ‘Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question’, 284.

²³² *Ibid*, 282.

This sympathy and preference for Arab over Turk, originating in Sudan service, would profoundly influence British policy during the war and long afterward.²³³ It represents what Kedourie aptly terms “sentimentality, so much in contrast with Curzon’s scepticism, and so misplaced in politics,”²³⁴ which would arguably colour official British attitudes until the sixth decade of the Twentieth century.

Kitchener’s distinctive approach to intelligence was particularly significant. Unlike formal military intelligence, which emphasised structured reporting and hierarchical analysis, Kitchener encouraged a more flexible approach that valued insights from unconventional sources. He was known to consult archaeologists, merchants, and tribal leaders for information that might not reach formal intelligence channels.²³⁵ This openness to diverse sources of knowledge would become a hallmark of the Arab Bureau’s methods.

Moreover, Kitchener established a pattern of using personal representatives and informal networks to bypass normal bureaucratic channels.²³⁶ His reliance on ‘men on the spot’ who could report directly to him created a precedent for the kind of autonomous intelligence operation that the Arab Bureau would later represent.²³⁷ By valuing personal observation and direct experience over formal reporting structures, Kitchener established an administrative culture that prioritised effectiveness over procedure.

The significance of this ‘Kitchener school’ of administration and intelligence would be amplified by subsequent events. The outbreak of war with the Ottoman Empire created a crisis

²³³ Renton, “Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient” (2007).

²³⁴ Kedourie, ‘Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question’, 282.

²³⁵ Richter, “Espionage and Near Eastern Archaeology” (2008).

²³⁶ Johnson, “The Arab Bureau and the Arab Revolt: Yanbu to Aqaba” (1982).

²³⁷ Richter, *ibid.*

that required rapid adaptation of existing intelligence structures. In this context, the flexible and personalised approach developed under Kitchener seemed particularly well-suited to the challenges of wartime intelligence. Figures like Clayton, who had served under Kitchener and absorbed his methods, were well-positioned to develop new intelligence structures that could respond to the unique demands of the Middle Eastern theatre.

The immediate catalyst for the Arab Bureau's creation came when Kitchener, now Secretary of State for War in London, recognised the need for a specialised intelligence unit focused on the Arab world. His familiarity with the region and its peoples convinced him that conventional military intelligence would be insufficient for understanding and influencing Arab dynamics. Drawing on his network of former subordinates and colleagues, he helped assemble the initial cadre of officials who would staff the Arab Bureau.

Mark Sykes, despite his limited knowledge of Arabic or Islamic history, became a key figure in this process due to his close relationship with Kitchener. An "unembarrassed amateur", Sykes claimed a degree of expertise that others believed, or else were unable to refute, largely because of widespread official ignorance about the region. As such, Sykes's role demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of Kitchener's approach: while it enabled rapid mobilisation of resources and personnel, it also allowed figures with limited expertise to exercise outsized influence.

This section aims to capture the multifaceted motivations and complex geopolitical environment that led to the establishment of the Arab Bureau. It sets the stage for understanding why such a unique and innovative intelligence unit was deemed necessary in this particular historical context. The Arab Bureau's establishment came at a critical juncture in the evolution

of British intelligence practices. When Ottoman naval vessels launched an attack against Russia's Black Sea coast, in October 1914, the luxury of developing government policy towards the Arab Middle East in peacetime vanished. This moment marked both a crisis and an opportunity for British intelligence innovation in the region. The situation was complicated by what has been characterised as an "administrative morass"²³⁸ in British Middle Eastern operations. Eighteen different individuals were empowered to advise on British policy in the region – not including Persia – creating a system that stumbled "from crisis to inertia, and from coma to panic, watching assets frittered away and opportunities missed."²³⁹ This administrative chaos demonstrated the urgent need for new approaches to regional intelligence and policy coordination, a key idea in this realm.

The Arab Bureau's establishment must be understood in the context of a complex imperial system in which Indian interests and perspectives played a crucial role. The Government of India and the India Office had long maintained their own intelligence networks throughout the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf and the Hejaz, focused on monitoring developments that might affect India's large Muslim population and its strategic position.

The Indian government's approach to intelligence was shaped by the traumatic experience of the 1857 Rebellion, which represented a catastrophic intelligence failure with severe consequences. As has been documented, British officials in India "regarded with deep suspicion, bordering on paranoia, any type of communication in India which they could not understand."²⁴⁰ Yet despite this suspicious attitude, they failed to detect the widespread discontent that would erupt into rebellion. The Chief Justice of Bombay's admission in 1863

²³⁸ Westrate, 22.

²³⁹ Sykes minute on Arabian Report, 15 October, 1916: I.O.L., L/P&S/10/586, file 705/1916.

²⁴⁰ Wagner, *Great Fear of 1857* (2010), quoted in Andrew, *Secret World*, 407.

that “the chief administrators of our vast Indian Empire ... are often, if not habitually, in complete ignorance of the most patent facts ... around them.”²⁴¹ epitomised this failure.

The rebellion’s aftermath saw a comprehensive overhaul of intelligence gathering methods in India. The Indian government developed systematic approaches to monitoring potential sources of unrest, particularly among religious communities. These methods emphasised rigorous documentation, extensive networks of informants, and centralised analysis of intelligence reports. This systematisation made intelligence “a higher priority in Calcutta than in London”,²⁴² and created an institutional culture that valued thoroughness and caution over flexibility and innovation.

Popplewell’s work on Imperial Defence provides valuable insight into how this Indian intelligence system operated.²⁴³ By the early twentieth century, the Indian Political Department had established a sophisticated network of agents and informants throughout the region, focusing particularly on potential threats to imperial security. This system was characterised by meticulous record-keeping, strict hierarchical reporting, and a primary focus on security rather than cultural understanding.

The Indian approach to Middle Eastern intelligence was deeply influenced by concerns about pan-Islamism and its potential to mobilise India’s Muslim subjects against British rule. With approximately twenty percent of India’s population being Muslim, and some thirty-five percent of the Indian Army at the start of the First World War being Muslim, any development that might inflame religious sentiment represented a significant security threat. The Ottoman

²⁴¹ Brown, *Modern India*, 152, quoted in Andrew, *Secret World*, 410.

²⁴² Andrew, *Secret World*, 410.

²⁴³ Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* (1995).

Sultan's position as Caliph gave events in the Middle East particular significance for Indian security.

This stark admission of intelligence failure stands in fascinating contrast to the fictional portrayal of British intelligence operations in India that appeared in *Kim*,²⁴⁴ where Kipling's immortal tale of adventure and derring-do on the north-west frontier presents an almost mythological vision of an efficient, all-seeing intelligence network, where British operatives and their multi-national agents move seamlessly through India's complex social and cultural landscapes. The gap between this fictional ideal and the historical reality reveals much about both British imperial ambitions and actual capabilities. The Arab Bureau would later attempt to bridge this gap developing methods that combined the cultural immersion celebrated in *Kim*, albeit with more practical and systematic approaches to intelligence gathering.

Perhaps paradoxically, given the power of post-war literary efforts such as *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* one might ask if reference to *Kim* reveals more than one might at first imagine, not so much about the evolution of British intelligence ambitions – which it does – but the blurring of fact and fiction, even a somewhat fictive approach to writing history as epic literature that both solidified the legend of Lawrence and muddied the history of the Arab Bureau from then on.

The concerns about Muslim loyalty during the war were not merely theoretical. Kelly's research on the Silk Letters Conspiracy provides a revealing case study of these concerns.²⁴⁵ This plot by a small clique of Indian pan-Islamists located in Afghanistan, India, and the Hejaz

²⁴⁴ Kipling, *Kim* (1901).

²⁴⁵ Kelly, "Crazy in the Extreme: The Silk Letters Conspiracy", (2013), 49:2; 162-178.

to overthrow British rule in India during the First World War was only revealed, in August 1916, through the interception of messages written on yellow silk handkerchiefs sewn into the lining of a courier's coat. The conspiracy involved figures in Afghanistan attempting to coordinate with allies in the Hejaz, with the goal of raising a revolt in India with Afghan, Turkish, and possibly German aid.

Although British officials initially characterised the plot as “pathetic”, “ineffectual”, and “crazy in the extreme”, there were also nagging doubts about its significance. Charles Cleveland, Director of the Criminal Intelligence Department in Delhi, admitted that, “It is all very pathetic and ineffective but nevertheless the danger of the cauldron of fanaticism boiling over is ever present.” The Foreign Department of the Government of India was convinced that, “There is, no doubt, conspiracy afoot in Kabul, with tentacles in India and Hedjaz [sic], which though fantastic in detail might if unchecked have serious developments.”²⁴⁶

For Captain Norman Bray, an Indian Army officer engaged in counter-intelligence activities in the Hejaz, the Silk Letters Conspiracy was “of vital importance only for the fact that it leads us one step nearer to an appreciation of the factors that called it into being.” It spurred Bray, before he left for active service in France, to consider the threat that pan-Islamism posed to the British Empire. Both Bray and Colonel Wilson, the British Agent in Jeddah, considered the Hejaz to be “a hotbed of intrigue” and full of “Indian sedition-mongers.”²⁴⁷

The conspiracy had its antecedents in the Indian Muslim reaction to successive defeats suffered by the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph at the hands of the European powers in North Africa and the

²⁴⁶ Kelly, “Crazy in the Extreme”, 163.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 163.

Balkans before the First World War. Its conspirators were not only involved in these events but in the Khilafat agitation after that war, thus demonstrating that the conspiracy was a key milestone in the development of the Indian pan-Islamic movement.

At the centre of the conspiracy was Maulvi Ubaidullah Sindhi, a Sikh convert to Islam and graduate of the Deoband College, who had established the Jami'a al-Ansar, an Old Boys' Association that functioned as a front for pan-Islamic activities. According to Valentine Vivian, the Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence, Ubaidullah Sindhi was "the leading spirit in the students' exodus"²⁴⁸ of 1915, when fifteen Muslim students from various colleges in the Punjab secretly left their homes and crossed into tribal territory to join the jihad against the British. The discovery of the conspiracy prompted a sophisticated counter-intelligence response. The British Criminal Intelligence Department in Delhi arranged, in September 1916, for the simultaneous arrest and house searches of various conspirators under the Defence of India Act across the Punjab, Delhi, Sind, and North-West Frontier Province. But the threat was not limited to India. In the Hejaz, Colonel Wilson, the British Agent in Jeddah, and Captain Bray investigated the activities of the Anjuman-i Khuddam-i Kaaba, or the Society of the Guardians of the Kaaba, and other pan-Islamist organisations to which many prominent Indian traders and pilgrims belonged.

Wilson used secret agents in Mecca to collect intelligence on various pan-Islamist and pro-Turkish societies operating in the city, but without the knowledge of the Sharif of Mecca.²⁴⁹ This covert intelligence-gathering effort revealed that more Indians and prominent residents of the Hejaz were involved with these societies than previously thought, and that they were

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 164.

²⁴⁹ Kelly, *ibid*, 172.

responsible for much hostility against the Sharif. Moreover, the Anjuman-i Khuddam-i Kaaba was discovered to be just one of several pan-Islamic societies operating in the Hejaz, including the Islam Lak, Nicheri, Anjuman-i-Islam, and Jehan Islam. The Sharif's ambivalent attitude toward these pan-Islamist activities adds another layer of complexity. Despite promising cooperation with Wilson in suppressing these societies, the Sharif continued to allow them to operate, seeing them as potential leverage in his bid for the Caliphate and a large Sharifian state in the Arab world. This reveals much about the Sharif's priorities and his willingness to play different sides against one another to achieve his goals.

The Arab Bureau emerged in response to several pressing needs. First was the centralisation of intelligence gathering and analysis about the Arab world, which previously had been scattered across various departments. Second was the recognition that deep cultural and linguistic knowledge was crucial for effective operations in the region. Third was the need to harmonise British inter-departmental policy-making activities in the region. Fourth was the anticipation, particularly after the de Bunsen committee,²⁵⁰ of expertise needed for shaping post-war arrangements. Finally, there was the need to support emerging Arab initiatives against Ottoman rule, though this element would develop later than the others.

The exigencies of war created an environment that both enabled and necessitated the creation of new intelligence structures. The conflict exposed inadequacies in existing British intelligence operations in the region, which were fragmented and too often lacked deep cultural understanding. The significance of this timing becomes clearer when we consider Herman's broader observation that, "between the two wars Britain had specialist intelligence agencies and departments; but these arrangements still presupposed that knowledge of foreign countries

²⁵⁰ After Sir Maurice de Bunsen (1852–1932).

could be organised in segments, not as a totality. The First World War had indeed shown that total war needed total intelligence ... But it took many years for this to be translated into intelligence responsibilities.”²⁵¹ This attempt to develop “total intelligence”, integrating military, political, and cultural knowledge, was ahead of its time and marked a significant departure from previous practices, which helps explain both the Arab Bureau’s innovative nature, and the resistance it encountered from more traditionally structured intelligence organisations.²⁵²

The Arab Bureau’s innovative approaches become even more apparent when contrasted with pre-war British military intelligence practices. As Beach notes, the army’s primary doctrine manual, *Field Service Regulations* of 1909, did not even have an index entry for ‘intelligence’, instead featuring a chapter entitled ‘Information’.²⁵³ This manual’s prioritisation of sources is telling: maps and reports first, followed by reconnaissance, with human intelligence sources like prisoner interrogation and local informants given lower priority. The Staff Manual of 1912 similarly reflected limited conceptualisation of intelligence work, treating “information as to the enemy”²⁵⁴ as a primarily operational rather than intelligence concern. Against this backdrop, the Arab Bureau’s integration of cultural expertise, academic knowledge, and diverse intelligence sources represented a notable departure from traditional military practices. Their emphasis on understanding local cultural and political dynamics, coupled with their innovative use of human intelligence networks, went far beyond the basic information-gathering approach outlined in pre-war doctrine.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Herman, (1996), 25.

²⁵² For a detailed theoretical framework for analysing intelligence organisational structures, and intelligence organisation theory, see Beach, *Haig’s Intelligence* (2015); and Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy* (2005).

²⁵³ Beach, *Haig’s Intelligence* (2015), 8-9.

²⁵⁴ Beach, *ibid*, 17.

²⁵⁵ The creation, in 1909, of Military Intelligence (MI) departments 5 and 6 alongside MI1 (operations), was the single most important pre-war change in Britain’s approach. For more on this departure into secret intelligence of a political, versus military, nature, see Andrew (2018); Deacon (1969); and Smith (2011) among others.

The Arab Bureau's response to these historical challenges manifested first in its unique approach to personnel and expertise. Rather than relying on traditional military intelligence officers, the Arab Bureau developed innovative approaches to recruitment and training that fundamentally shaped its operations and effectiveness. As will be seen, any success enjoyed by the Arab Bureau depended largely on the successful implementation of this innovative approach to regional intelligence, bringing together individuals with diverse skills and knowledge in ways that departed significantly from traditional military intelligence practice.

The establishment of the Arab Bureau occurred amid diplomatic manoeuvring between the British and the Sharif of Mecca. Sir Henry McMahon seemed somewhat ambivalent about his role in initiating contact with Sharif Hussein. At a conference in Cairo on 12 September 1916,²⁵⁶ McMahon explained his involvement: "It was the most unfortunate date in my life when I was left in charge of this Arab movement and I think a few words are necessary to explain that it is nothing to do with me: it is a purely military business. It began at the urgent request of Sir Ian Hamilton at Gallipoli. I was begged by the Foreign Office to take immediate action and draw the Arabs out of the war. At that moment a large portion of the (Turkish) force at Gallipoli and nearly the whole of the force in Mesopotamia were Arabs, and the Germans were then spending a large amount of money in detaching the rest of the Arabs, so the situation was that the Arabs were between the two. Could we give them some guarantee of assistance in the future to justify their splitting with the Turks? I was told to do that at once and in that way I started the Arab movement."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Kedourie, 'Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question', 281.

²⁵⁷ Kedourie, *ibid*, 281.

This blunt and cursory account indicates the precise date at which the possibilities of Sharifian rebellion began to be taken seriously, and the military exigencies which gave rise to this new attitude. Before the autumn of 1915, British ministers did not think that a Sharifian movement would be efficient or useful in the short run, and they were afraid that in the long run encouragement of the Sharif would be troublesome and costly. This, certainly, was Curzon's view.

The urgent tone of the officials in Khartoum and Cairo is easily appreciated. Their responsibility for internal security, their proximity to the Ottoman theatre of war, made them eager to close a deal with the Sharif, and impatient with the delays and objections to which they were subjected from London. There was a grave risk, they were convinced, that if their aspirations were not satisfied, the Arabs would irrevocably side with the Turks.

When, at the end of October 1915, negotiations with the Sharif were at last begun in earnest, Clayton wondered whether it was not already too late; at any rate, if they were still in time, he thought it was a near thing.²⁵⁸ By the middle of the following November when the India Office were still objecting to the Sharif's demands, McMahon telegraphed to warn the authorities that the matter brooked no more delay and, to reinforce his argument, cited a letter from the Sharif to Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, the Sudanese religious dignitary, to the effect that if the British did not hasten to make an agreement, the Arabs would give their support to the Turks and the Germans.

Such haste and urgency in a case which was by no means so pressing or so dangerous as they represented, such eagerness at once to concede the patently inflated claims which the Sharif

²⁵⁸ Kedourie, 'Cairo and Khartoum on the Arab Question', 283.

must have advanced in expectation of long and arduous bargaining, are surprising in cautious and experienced officials. The exigencies of the hour do not completely account for their attitude. They were worried, certainly, about the immediate future, but they also wanted to seize the opportunity of the war to advance a scheme which, were it to succeed, would greatly increase Great Britain's power and influence in the Middle East, would indeed make it the arbiter of the destinies of Islam in the world.

British imperial interests in the region were multifaceted. The Middle East provided a buffer for India, contained vital communication and trade routes, most obviously the Suez Canal, and was increasingly recognised as a source of oil, a resource of growing strategic importance, for instance, the Government of India saw Mesopotamia as a vital future source of grain as the population of India grew rapidly. Against prior expectations, the opening salvos in the war against the Ottoman empire revealed a level of military professionalism that British intelligence had vastly underestimated. Following two disastrous encounters – Gallipoli, between April 1915 and January 1916; and Kut al-Amara, from December 1915 to April 1916 – the Allies latterly grasped two linked facts: there would be no quick victory against Ottoman forces, and the Middle East had become a major front in what was now genuinely a world war.

The Ottoman entry into the war was also an opportunity for Britain to revisit its pre-war policy of neutrality regarding the demands of the emerging Arab nationalist movement. While there was growing resentment against Ottoman rule in some quarters, a majority of Arabs remained loyal to the Ottoman state; there were various reasons for this, which included the Sultan's role as Caliph. Britain needed to carefully navigate these complexities, which required a nuanced understanding of local politics and cultural dynamics. That said, many key players, including

Sykes, and established departments, for instance Foreign, Colonial, and India Offices, were not convinced that Arab interests were important: the Arab Bureau stood out in this regard.

The situation demanded new approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis and, as one author has noted, “Intelligence organisations in the First World War period were forced to innovate rapidly, often creating new methodologies that challenged existing institutional frameworks.”²⁵⁹ It was into this space, and its pre-existing networks, that the Arab Bureau stepped. Traditional military intelligence, focused primarily on enemy capabilities and movements, proved lacking for understanding the complex cultural and political landscape, and the need for more sophisticated intelligence operations became particularly apparent after the failures at Gallipoli and Kut al-Amara, where inadequate understanding of both Ottoman military capabilities and local conditions had contributed to British defeats.

The establishment of the Arab Bureau thus represented not just an administrative reorganisation but a fundamental innovation in how British intelligence approached regional operations. Its creation acknowledged that effective intelligence work in the Middle East required deep cultural understanding, sophisticated analysis of political dynamics, and the ability to integrate multiple types of knowledge. This innovative approach would shape not only Arab Bureau operations but also its unique composition and methods.

The tensions between India Office and Arab Bureau approaches reflected deeper divisions in British intelligence practice, and which unsurprisingly led critics to attack them as ‘amateurs’ in terms of the general lack of professional military intelligence background. In fairness to

²⁵⁹ Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy* (2005), 124. Also, Syk (2009) shows Maude’s intelligence staff, in 1917, producing an innovative cell structure that aided the flow of political and military intelligence.

Arab Bureau members, as is highlighted throughout this study, the field of military intelligence had only recently gone through a process of formalisation, a progression which was far from complete at this stage. India represented a notable exception, where imperial police forces and military units had developed established intelligence operations, supported by networks of local informants and assets.

The most visible expression of this Indian intelligence infrastructure in the Arab theatre was the Indian Political Service (IPS). Operating under the authority of the Government of India, IPS officers had maintained a presence in the Persian Gulf and along the Arabian littoral for decades before the Arab Bureau's creation, gathering intelligence on tribal politics, Ottoman movements, and the activities of foreign powers – particularly Russia and Germany – in the region. In the Gulf specifically, the IPS cultivated relationships with local rulers, monitored maritime trade, and maintained a network of informants that gave India considerable situational awareness along this strategically vital coastline. Popplewell's study of British intelligence and the defence of the Indian Empire documents how, by the early twentieth century, this system was extensive, methodical, and, within its carefully circumscribed remit, effective.²⁶⁰

The Levant Consular service represented a parallel but institutionally distinct intelligence resource. British consuls stationed in Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, and Jerusalem had, in the decades before the war, accumulated detailed local knowledge of Ottoman administrative practice, the Arab notable class, and the emerging currents of Arab nationalism. Their dispatches, flowing through the Foreign Office rather than the India Office, provided London with a granular picture of conditions in the Ottoman Arab provinces that neither Cairo nor Delhi could easily replicate. By 1916, however, this consular network had been largely

²⁶⁰ Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* (1995).

dismantled: the Ottoman entry into the war in November 1914 had required the withdrawal or internment of most British consular staff across the Levant, and the intelligence stream they had provided was effectively severed.

These structural realities are essential context for any assessment of comparative intelligence efficacy in 1916. The IPS's considerable strengths lay in the Gulf and in monitoring developments affecting India's Muslim subjects; a remit the India Office jealously guarded and from which the Arab Bureau was formally excluded.²⁶¹ The IPS's coverage of the Hejaz, and of the Arab Revolt's principal theatre of operations, was correspondingly limited: jurisdiction over those areas was actively contested and in practice ceded to Cairo. The Levant Consular network, in turn, was operationally dormant. It was into this gap, between the IPS's Gulf focus and the Levant network's enforced absence, that the Arab Bureau stepped, producing from June 1916 a systematic, analytical, multi-source intelligence publication in the *Arab Bulletin* that rapidly became the primary intelligence resource for British decision-makers across the region, and for which neither the IPS nor the Levant Consular service offered any equivalent.

These differences extended to the Committee of Imperial Defence itself. Despite their superficially similar backgrounds, i.e. white men at the heart of British imperial governance, committee members brought markedly different perspectives to intelligence work. Differences matter. Those with Anglo-Irish backgrounds and or professional experience in Ireland typically approached intelligence through the lens of domestic policing and security operations. By contrast, those with Indian experience viewed it through the prism of imperial control over subject populations. These distinct perspectives, even if latent, made it difficult for Committee members to agree on the Arab Bureau's precise role, discussing as they were two essentially

²⁶¹ Morris, 'Intelligence and its Interpretation: Mesopotamia, 1914-16' (1987).

different conceptions of intelligence work: one focused on policing an unruly minority in a domestic context; the other maintaining imperial control over a majority population in foreign territories.

The India Office's opposition to the Arab Bureau "experiment"²⁶² demonstrates what Aldrich terms the "institutional resistance to innovative intelligence structures".²⁶³ This resistance reflected deeper tensions within British imperial administration, illustrating Davies' observation about the challenges of operating at the intersection of traditional and innovative intelligence practices.²⁶⁴ The depth of institutional conflict, clearly documented in the historical record, exemplifies Herman's analysis²⁶⁵ of how wartime intelligence innovations often faced resistance from established institutional frameworks. This tension between innovation and institutional tradition would prove crucial in shaping the Arab Bureau's operational methods and effectiveness.

The Terms of Reference document was still referring to "the establishment of an Islamic Bureau at Cairo."²⁶⁶ This terminology, published just days before the final establishment of the Arab Bureau, indicates both the haste with which the Islamic – or Arab – Bureau was conceived and delivered, as well as the ongoing tensions over its role. India's initial objection to the title "Islamic Bureau" stemmed from concerns about interference with India's Muslim population,²⁶⁷ which at that time comprised approximately twenty percent of the country's total, and some thirty-five percent of the Indian Army at the start of the First World War.²⁶⁸

²⁶² Sir Percy Lake, British commander in Mesopotamia, to Foreign Department, Simla, 11 June 1916, I.O.L., L/P&S/10/576/F4744.

²⁶³ Aldrich, 'Strategic Culture as a Constraint' (2017), 629.

²⁶⁴ Davies, *Intelligence and Government* (2012), 144.

²⁶⁵ Introduced above: Herman (1996), 105.

²⁶⁶ FO/882/2 ARB/16: 6 January 1916.

²⁶⁷ FO/882/2 ARB/16/4: 10 January 1916.

²⁶⁸ Morton-Jack, *The Indian Empire At War* (2018); Sumner, *The Indian Army 1914–1947* (2001), 3.

In 1914, the Indian Army was one of the two largest volunteer armies in the world,²⁶⁹ with a total strength of 240,000 men,²⁷⁰ while the British Army had approximately 247,000 regular volunteers at the outbreak of the war. Given that Britain would eventually deploy 1.2 million Indian forces over the course of the war, the India Office's sensitivity to anything that might affect Muslim loyalty was far from mere bureaucratic paranoia. The fact of the India Office's successful insistence on the Arab Bureau's name being changed from Islamic to Arab reflected both deep-held concerns about potential interference with 'their' Muslim population and also the strength of the India Office, which would prove a permanent sore in the side of the Arab Bureau throughout its existence.

The dispute extended beyond questions of jurisdiction to fundamental approaches to intelligence gathering. The India Office, drawing on its experience of the 1857 Mutiny, had developed its own intelligence methods and institutional memory. As one chief administrator noted in 1863, "the chief administrators of our vast Indian Empire ... are often, if not habitually, in complete ignorance of the most patent facts ... around them."²⁷¹ This admission had led to the development of more systematic intelligence gathering methods, but also created a much more rigid institutional approach that conflicted with the Arab Bureau's more flexible methods. While both the government of India and the Arab Bureau sought to avoid repeating such failures of understanding, their basic approaches were, and remained, in fundamental opposition to one another.

²⁶⁹ Morton-Jack, *ibid*; and Sumner, *ibid*.

²⁷⁰ Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies* (1988), 85; Perry, *Order of Battle of Divisions Part 5B* (1993).

²⁷¹ Perry, *ibid*.

Establishing the Arab Bureau in Cairo, rather than London or Delhi, became a particular point of contention, the India Office viewing this choice of location as a threat to their authority over the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia.²⁷² Their concerns were exacerbated by the Arab Bureau's vaguely defined remit: its founding document was just a page-and-a-half long, and left considerable room for jurisdictional disputes. Even when officials from India were seconded to Arab Bureau HQ tensions persisted. In at least one case, an official resigned and returned to Delhi, citing an unfriendly and obstructive atmosphere²⁷³ in Arab Bureau HQ, the Savoy, Cairo.

These conflicts had practical consequences for Arab Bureau operations. The India Office successfully restricted Arab Bureau involvement in all matters pertaining to Indian Muslims, whether in India or abroad, as well as limiting the Arab Bureau's ability to produce or disseminate propaganda material for Indian audiences. However, these restrictions paradoxically contributed to Arab Bureau innovation in other areas. Being unable to operate within traditional imperial frameworks they were forced to develop new approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis. The Arab Bureau's response to these institutional constraints demonstrated their innovative capacity, because instead of simply attempting to replicate India Office methods, they developed approaches that emphasised cultural understanding and flexible operational structures. Additionally, their focus on Arab affairs, while partly imposed by India Office restrictions, in fact led to the development of more complex and considered methods for understanding regional dynamics.

This institutional conflict reveals a broader pattern in intelligence innovation. The Arab Bureau's position outside traditional imperial structures, while creating operational challenges,

²⁷² Morris, 'Intelligence and its Interpretation: Mesopotamia, 1914-16' (1987).

²⁷³ Westrate, 50-51.

also enabled them to develop new approaches to intelligence, while their experience demonstrates how institutional constraints can drive innovation, forcing the development of alternative methods and approaches. The tensions between the Arab Bureau and India also highlight an enduring challenge in intelligence work: balancing institutional expertise with innovation. Resistance on the part of the India Office to Arab Bureau methods reflected not just bureaucratic territoriality but genuine concern about maintaining established approaches to imperial administration. Understanding this tension helps explain both Arab Bureau originality and the resistance they encountered.

Another useful comparison here is that of degrees of secrecy, as applied to propaganda production.²⁷⁴ While both Wellington House, in London, and the Arab Bureau, in Cairo, operated under veils of secrecy, their approaches differed significantly. Wellington House maintained such strict confidentiality that even Cabinet members were initially unaware of its existence.²⁷⁵ The Arab Bureau, by contrast, while still secret, had to balance its clandestine nature with the need for more open interactions with local populations and military operations. This tension between secrecy and engagement became a defining characteristic of Arab Bureau operations, setting it apart from other intelligence, and propaganda-generating, organisations of the time.

The composition of the Arab Bureau was as unique as its mandate, bringing together an eclectic group of individuals whose backgrounds and expertise set them apart from traditional military intelligence units. This ‘oddity’ in personnel selection was both a strength and a source of

²⁷⁴ See Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

²⁷⁵ Taylor, ‘The Foreign Office and British Propaganda’ (1980), 877.

criticism, ultimately contributing to the Arab Bureau's take on intelligence gathering and analysis.

Any discussion of Arab Bureau personnel will almost indubitably attribute heightened cultural understanding of its membership, although any claims that Lawrence and his compatriots could 'read', 'understood' or otherwise 'got' Arabs are problematic to say the least. At the same time, in the interests of nuance and veracity it can be said be that many Arab Bureau members did indeed have more experience of, cultural exposure to, enhanced regional linguistic capabilities, and awareness of the historical, religious, cultural, and ethno-linguistic differences of the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa than many of their predecessors in comparable contemporary units. Given this, one might also like to attribute to their number some heightened awareness of the challenges faced by any foreign power seeking to interfere in or rule over the region, and in many cases this was true.

For instance, unlike Wellington House, and heavy reliance on literary names, the Arab Bureau's approach was to leverage experts with more local knowledge and language skills. Figures like Hogarth, Bell, and Lawrence brought not just an element of linguistic competence but also greater understanding of local customs, politics, and social dynamics. This cultural engagement allowed the Arab Bureau to craft more sophisticated and culturally appropriate strategies, marking a significant departure from the more distant, metropolitan approach of Wellington House.²⁷⁶

Without overstating the case, some Arab Bureau members were not only sensitive to local cultures but often broadly sympathetic to them, even where this strayed into Orientalism,

²⁷⁶ Radu, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda' (2009).

perhaps essentialising certain issues they confronted for the sake of results. Then too, in pursuit of their duties they were inevitably not always (or ever), acting in the best interests of those locals with whom they felt some empathy or even attraction. Still, it might be argued that any level of understanding, and indeed empathy, is better than avowed ignorance and indifference. As such, whether or not this made any actual difference, the Arab Bureau's knowledge base was such that it marked a shift from regular military practises.

Their personal and professional backgrounds helped them navigate complex local cultural, political, and tribal dynamics, crucial to their role in the region. Connected to this were local networks, among both the general population and notables, with whom they interacted and worked, and with whom they developed, built and maintained a range of overlapping informational webs, with reliable (and other, less reliable, more venal) sources and collaborators across diverse regions and sectors. One of the most interesting aspects of their cultural engagement was the significant role they played in enabling a convenient synergy of efforts between the wartime British administration and anti-Ottoman Arab nationalist activists in Egypt.²⁷⁷

The Arab Bureau's distinctive composition reflected a sophisticated understanding of the expertise required for effective intelligence work in the region. Rather than prioritising military experience, the Arab Bureau developed an approach to recruitment and training that would fundamentally shape its operations and effectiveness, not least by actively seeking out individuals with deep cultural and scholastic knowledge of the Middle East, so that academics, archaeologists, linguists, and other regional experts worked alongside military officers. This

²⁷⁷ Chapters 5 and 6.

distinctive composition exemplifies Cooper and Schendel's concept of organisational adaptation to new operational requirements.²⁷⁸

Further, it was an innovative approach to personnel selection that not only reflected a sophisticated understanding of intelligence needs but also demonstrated the principle of transformative organisational change.²⁷⁹ Meanwhile, by integrating academic expertise with military intelligence requirements, the Arab Bureau created what has been described as a "hybrid knowledge structure",²⁸⁰ which could effectively bridge cultural and operational demands. Taken together, this approach allowed for a depth of cultural understanding and analysis, marked a serious departure from conventional military intelligence staffing practices, and thus represented a fundamental innovation in how intelligence units were constituted. By way of testing this theory, let us briefly note three personnel examples.

Gilbert Clayton's dual background in military affairs and colonial administration provided crucial leadership that bridged traditional military intelligence and the Arab Bureau's more unconventional approaches. His experience in Egypt and Sudan gave him invaluable insights into regional dynamics while his military credentials helped legitimise Arab Bureau operations with more traditional military authorities.²⁸¹

David Hogarth's presence as Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean exemplified how the Arab Bureau integrated academic expertise with intelligence work. His scholarly approach to regional analysis set new standards for intelligence reporting, while his pre-war archaeological

²⁷⁸ Cooper and Schendel, *Strategic Responses to Technological Threats* (1976), 63.

²⁷⁹ Foster and Kaplan, *Creative Destruction* (2000), 43.

²⁸⁰ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007), 156.

²⁸¹ For more on Colonial Administration Theory, and administrative structures in imperial settings see Kumar, *Seeing like a Policeman* (2018); and Ullah, 'Colonial Policing and Police Administration' (2024).

networks provided valuable channels for intelligence gathering. Hogarth's emphasis on comprehensive regional understanding – encompassing everything from ancient history to contemporary tribal politics – anticipated modern approaches to area studies.

Gertrude Bell's inclusion was revolutionary not only for her gender but for what it represented about Arab Bureau priorities. Her extensive regional travels, linguistic abilities, and knowledge of tribal politics demonstrated the unit's commitment to cultural expertise over traditional military experience. Bell's work also exemplifies how the Arab Bureau's innovative recruitment practices enhanced intelligence capabilities through unconventional expertise.

This pioneering approach to personnel was particularly evident in the Arab Bureau's handling of language capabilities and cultural expertise. Their understanding of these crucial skills went well beyond contemporary military practice, instead reflecting a new, more insightful approach to intelligence gathering in culturally distinct regions. At the same time, the question of language capabilities within the Arab Bureau reveals both the complexities of intelligence work in these same spaces and, further, questions around language proficiency also reveals the strengths and limitations of their approach. While popular accounts sometimes overstate the Arabic language capabilities of the Arab Bureau as a whole they were unquestionably superior to those found in comparable British units.

The challenges of producing authentic Arabic materials are illustrated by a pertinent observation from one of Forester's²⁸² Napoleonic-era Hornblower novels. Addressing the claims of a group of British naval officers, a master forger responds, "You gentlemen may pride yourselves on writing good French, grammatical French, but a Frenchman reading it would

²⁸² C.S. Forester (b. Cairo, 1899-1966).

know it was not written by a Frenchman ... You must have your French composed ab initio by a Frenchman, contenting yourselves with merely outlining what is to be said.”²⁸³ This observation perfectly captures the Arab Bureau’s experience with Arabic language productions. Indeed, this understanding clearly informs their approach to both major works like *Thawrat al-Arab* and other, smaller scale works of propaganda in Arabic,²⁸⁴ where all the available evidence suggests that neither Lawrence, despite his reputation, nor his colleagues were the primary, first-hand authors of these texts, given the challenges inherent in foreign language productions.

Lawrence’s personal capabilities with Arabic might be seen as exemplifying the strengths and confines of the Arab Bureau’s language expertise. Before the war, Lawrence had received just two months of formal Arabic instruction at the American Mission School, in Jebail, Lebanon, under the tutelage of Miss Fareedah al-Akle.²⁸⁵ Lawrence himself acknowledged his linguistic limitations, noting that he had “never heard an Englishman speak Arabic well enough to be taken for a native of any part of the Arabic-speaking world, for five minutes.”²⁸⁶ In an interview with one biographer,²⁸⁷ Lawrence claimed, “In the end I had control of some 12,000 words ... a good vocabulary for English, but not enough for Arabic, which is a very wide language; and I used to fit these words together with a grammar and syntax of my own invention. Feisal called my Arabic “a perpetual adventure” and used to provoke me to speak to him so that he might enjoy it.”²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Forester, *Hornblower During the Crisis* (1967), 109.

²⁸⁴ See Chapters 5 and 6.

²⁸⁵ Mousa, *T.E. Lawrence an Arab View* (1966), 5.

²⁸⁶ Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs* (1927), 166.

²⁸⁷ Robert Graves (1895-1985).

²⁸⁸ Graves, *ibid*, 166.

Graves also noted that, “Lawrence is not an Arabic scholar. [...] But he is fluent in conversational Arabic, and can tell pretty accurately by a man’s accent and the expressions he uses from what tribe or district of Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia or Palestine he comes.”²⁸⁹ While reserving a final judgement on this claim, we might simply acknowledge that his approach to the language was pragmatic rather than scholarly. Based on accounts from Arabs who worked with him during the war, his Arabic was functional, if heavily accented, suitable for basic communication but far from fluent; robust enough for the purposes of daily communication, which was after all what he needed it for, but likely to utterly fail any examination by a gimlet-eyed grammarian. This practical but imperfect command of Arabic might actually be seen as an advantage, demonstrating as it does an emphasis on functional communication over academic perfection.

But focusing solely on questions of linguistic fluency misses the broader significance of the Arab Bureau’s approach. What distinguished the Arab Bureau was not necessarily native-level fluency but, rather, their recognition of language as one component of broader cultural understanding. Their approach stood in marked contrast to the British experience in India at this time, where it was said that the British “regarded with deep suspicion, bordering on paranoia, any type of communication in India which they could not understand.”²⁹⁰ The Arab Bureau’s emphasis on combining linguistic knowledge with cultural expertise, while still operating within imperial constraints, represented a significant innovation in intelligence practices.

²⁸⁹ Graves, *ibid*, 20.

²⁹⁰ Wagner, *Great Fear of 1857* (2010), quoted in Andrew, *Secret World*, 407.

This insight was particularly evident in their propaganda work, where they understood that effective Arabic materials required not just linguistic accuracy but cultural resonance. The Arab Bureau's linguistic challenges reflect what Thomas²⁹¹ identifies as the fundamental difference between basic language capability and operational cultural intelligence, where "Cultural intelligence requires more than mere familiarity with local customs; it demands a sophisticated understanding of how cultural knowledge can be operationalized."²⁹² During the period of the 'veiled protectorate', the limited Arabic skills among British officials exemplified what has been described as the tendency of colonial administrations to prioritise their own cultural frameworks over deep engagement with local languages and customs.²⁹³ While hardly surprising, as Willmetts argues in his analysis of cultural intelligence, "Intelligence agencies must recognize culture not merely as context but as a fundamental aspect of operational effectiveness."²⁹⁴ In other words, such a shortcoming was more than a simple communication barrier but, rather, signified a broader challenge in developing the kind of sophisticated cultural understanding necessary for effective intelligence operations. The Arab Bureau's response to this challenge, i.e. actively recruiting individuals with deeper linguistic and cultural expertise, marked a significant departure from traditional colonial administrative practices.

The Arab Bureau addressed these limitations through innovative approaches to language and communication. They developed networks of translators and cultural intermediaries, recognising that effective intelligence work required more than direct translation, while their understanding of regional dialects and linguistic variations helped them assess the origin and authenticity of information, even when their own language skills were limited.

²⁹¹ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007), 156.

²⁹² Thomas, *ibid*, 156.

²⁹³ Hall, *Beyond Culture* (1976), 30.

²⁹⁴ Willmetts, 'The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies' (2019), 803.

This approach to managing language barriers represented a significant innovation in intelligence practices: a pragmatic yet refined approach to language capabilities that reflected their broader innovation in intelligence practices. Rather than treating language skills as a mere technical requirement, the Arab Bureau understood linguistic knowledge as part of a broader cultural competence necessary for effective intelligence work. The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach to language and cultural expertise was reflected in and supported by their innovative recruitment and training practices, which demonstrated a fundamental reconceptualisation of what constituted valuable expertise in intelligence work. So, while their actual language capabilities may have fallen short of later romanticised accounts, their understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and intelligence gathering anticipated modern approaches to cultural intelligence.²⁹⁵

Meanwhile, Arab Bureau recruitment and training methods represented another departure from contemporary military intelligence practices, with their emphasis on cultural expertise and academic knowledge, rather than purely military experience, establishing new paradigms for intelligence personnel selection.²⁹⁶ The goal was to seek out individuals whose expertise transcended traditional military intelligence backgrounds, prioritising deep regional knowledge and cultural understanding. Archaeological expertise proved particularly valuable, providing some understanding of regional geography and history, while linguistic abilities, in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and regional languages, were considered essential. The Arab Bureau particularly valued individuals who combined academic expertise in regional studies with practical experience gained through regional travel and exploration. This emphasis on scholarly knowledge combined with field experience reflected their sophisticated understanding of the

²⁹⁵ On cultural intelligence framework analysis and cultural intelligence gathering, see Wagner, *Empire and Information* (2010); and Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007).

²⁹⁶ For organisational innovation theory, see Cooper and Schendel, *Strategic Responses to Technological Threats* (1976); for a critical update to this research see Foster and Kaplan, *Creative Destruction* (2000).

expertise needed for effective intelligence work in the Middle East. Such an approach to recruitment often put them at odds with traditional military authorities who viewed their personnel as “amateurs.” However, Arab Bureau leadership recognised that effective intelligence work in the Middle East required different skill sets than conventional military intelligence.

At the other extreme of the scale we encounter the unembarrassed amateur Sykes, who lacking Arabic language training – or Persian, Islamic history, diplomatic or other possibly relevant preparation, bar travels – but because official ignorance was so deep and widespread he was able to claim expertise that was accepted and could anyway not be disproved.²⁹⁷ The agreement to which his name is ineluctably attached perhaps hints at the damage that can result from enthusiastic but unchecked involvement, or interference, in matters of importance.

The Arab Bureau’s approach to training also departed from conventional military intelligence practices. Rather than emphasising formal procedures and hierarchical reporting structures, they developed methods that prioritised cultural immersion and understanding. Personnel were encouraged to develop networks of local contacts while deepening their understanding of regional political and social dynamics. The Arab Bureau’s approach emphasised the integration of academic knowledge with practical intelligence work, creating a unique synthesis of scholarly and operational expertise. Overall staffing choices reflected practical necessity and strategic innovation, while the shortage of Arabic speakers in British service forced them to look for personnel beyond traditional military channels. This necessity became an advantage, bringing together individuals whose diverse expertise enhanced Arab Bureau capabilities. In support of this analysis around flexible organisational structures, it might be said that, “The

²⁹⁷ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 106.

ability to transform operational methods in response to changing circumstances is often more important than maintaining established procedures.”²⁹⁸

However, their recruitment practices also created challenges. The integration of civilian experts with military personnel sometimes created tensions over authority and methodology. To solve this, the Arab Bureau developed flexible organisational structures that could accommodate different types of expertise while maintaining operational effectiveness. Although originally formulated with technological novelty in mind, organisational innovation theory is also directly relevant to Arab Bureau’s innovative approach to intelligence gathering. As summed up by Cooper and Schendel, “Organizations facing technological threats must either adapt their existing capabilities or develop new ones. This adaptation process often involves fundamental changes in how organizations gather and process information.”²⁹⁹ In the current study, this theory is equally relevant in the realm of technological innovation and adaptation, as shall be seen below.

The success of these unconventional recruitment practices demonstrated the value of prioritising regional expertise over traditional military experience in intelligence work, an approach anticipated modern intelligence practices, which emphasise cultural and linguistic expertise alongside operational capabilities. The integration of academic expertise represented perhaps the Arab Bureau’s most significant innovation in personnel practices, which went beyond simply consulting scholars to fundamentally reshape how intelligence work could incorporate scholarly knowledge.

²⁹⁸ Foster and Kaplan, *Creative Destruction* (2000), 43.

²⁹⁹ Cooper and Schendel, ‘Strategic Responses to Technological Threats’ (1976), 63.

The Arab Bureau's integration of academic expertise into intelligence operations represented a significant practical innovation, even if the relationship between scholarly pursuits and intelligence gathering in the region was often blurred, with archaeology serving, as Satia puts it, as "a prestige issue impinging on geopolitical considerations."³⁰⁰ The Arab Bureau formalised and expanded this relationship in unprecedented ways.

Hogarth's role exemplified this integration of academic and intelligence work. As a distinguished archaeologist, Hogarth brought scholarly rigour to intelligence analysis that went far beyond contemporary practice. His exhortation to "wandering scholars" to interpret their brief ecumenically, encompassing "maps and political reports, customs and types and folk-lore, eggs and bulbs and butterflies and rocks,"³⁰¹ reflected the Arab Bureau's broader understanding of how academic knowledge could enhance intelligence work.

The Arab Bureau's relationship with academia extended beyond individual expertise to encompass broader networks of scholarly knowledge. Pre-war academic networks, particularly those developed through archaeological expeditions, provided valuable channels for intelligence gathering. Archaeological sites served as both cover for intelligence work and genuine sources of regional knowledge, while academic connections facilitated access to local elites and information networks. This integration of academic expertise challenged traditional military assumptions about intelligence gathering. Where conventional military intelligence focused primarily on enemy capabilities and movements, the Arab Bureau's academic connections enabled deeper understanding of cultural, social, and political dynamics. Their

³⁰⁰ Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 56.

³⁰¹ Satia, *ibid*, 35.

approach demonstrated how scholarly knowledge could enhance operational effectiveness rather than merely providing contextual background.

However, this relationship between academia and intelligence work created its own tensions, as Arab Bureau members had to balance scholarly integrity with operational requirements, and academic objectivity with imperial objectives. These tensions, while sometimes challenging, often drove innovation in both intelligence gathering and analysis methods. Their experience demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of integrating academic expertise into intelligence operations, while wartime needs no doubt salved and overturned many peacetime qualms.

The Arab Bureau's innovative approaches to personnel and expertise required equally innovative institutional frameworks to be effective, and so their organisational structure and practices evolved to support and enhance these new approaches to intelligence work. While these were perhaps necessary steps in order to guarantee operational viability in this new reality, they too marked a significant departure from contemporary military intelligence practice. The concept of an imperial epistemic community provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding how the Arab Bureau bridged traditional divisions between academic expertise and intelligence work, functioning as a nexus of knowledge production and dissemination, shaping British understanding of and engagement with the Middle East during a critical period of imperial transition. In contrast with previous intelligence units, which viewed scholarly knowledge as peripheral to their mission, the Arab Bureau actively integrated academic expertise into its operational framework.

An epistemic community, in its broadest sense, refers to a network of knowledge-based experts who share a common worldview and approach to understanding a particular domain. The Arab Bureau's composition and operational methods positioned it as a unique imperial epistemic community, bringing together expertise that far exceeded traditional military intelligence.³⁰²

Their interdisciplinary approach allowed the Arab Bureau to produce a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Middle East than had previously been available to British policymakers. Their success in combining scholarly understanding with practical intelligence requirements, particularly evident in their treatment of Arab nationalism, suggested new possibilities for intelligence work. However, even if this new approach was partly born of necessity, the integration of academic expertise with intelligence work created its own tensions, contradictions, and questions, specifically around the relationship between knowledge production and imperial control.

The influence of cultural assumptions on the Arab Bureau's intelligence gathering and analysis reveals both the possibilities and limitations of their approach. While its members possessed a level of cultural understanding that was rare for their time, they were not immune to the Orientalist attitudes that pervaded British imperial thinking. Without exception, they remained fundamentally committed to imperial objectives even as they developed more sophisticated approaches to understanding the region, even if its membership held a range of opinions about how best Britain's imperial objectives should be implemented. These assumptions inevitably coloured their interpretations and recommendations, shaping British policy in ways that reflected both their deep knowledge of the region and the limitations of their imperial

³⁰² For more on information networks and knowledge transfer in imperial settings see Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1996).

perspective. As such, their work demonstrates how an imperial epistemic community could simultaneously advance both scholarly understanding and imperial control, creating new forms of knowledge that served multiple purposes. The Arab Bureau's development as an imperial epistemic community was significantly shaped by institutional conflicts, particularly with the India Office. These tensions, while challenging, ultimately drove further innovation in their approaches.

The Arab Bureau developed a sophisticated intelligence network that extended across the Middle East, utilising diverse sources and methods to gather and analyse information. This network represented a significant innovation in British intelligence practices, combining traditional sources with new approaches tailored to the unique challenges of the region.

The foundation of the Arab Bureau's intelligence gathering lay in its human intelligence (HUMINT) network. This network included both formal and informal sources, ranging from military officers and political agents to traders, archaeologists, and tribal informants. The Arab Bureau's approach to human intelligence was distinguished by its emphasis on cultural understanding and relationship building. Unlike traditional military intelligence, which often treated local informants as mere sources of information, the Arab Bureau sought to develop deeper relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

The Arab Bureau's approach to human intelligence was complemented by its innovative use of documentary sources. The Arab Bureau maintained an extensive archive of materials on the region, including diplomatic reports, military assessments, academic studies, and local publications. This documentary base allowed Arab Bureau analysts to contextualise field

reports within broader historical and cultural frameworks, enhancing the depth and accuracy of their assessments.

The Arab Bureau's response to institutional challenges included innovative approaches to technological adaptation, and their integration of these emerging technologies with traditional methods demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of innovation in intelligence operations within imperial structures in the early twentieth-century. In fact, their response is the embodiment of the view, and response to it, that, "Information gathering in colonial contexts was not merely a technical process but a complex negotiation between different knowledge systems",³⁰³ while their ground-breaking approaches to technological adaptation, particularly in integrating emerging technologies with traditional methods, demonstrated what has been identified as the crucial balance between formal and informal information networks.³⁰⁴ This synthesis of different information-gathering approaches represented a significant advancement in early twentieth-century intelligence operations, while also revealing the inherent limitations of innovation within imperial structures. As Darnton suggests in his analysis of information circulation patterns,³⁰⁵ the effectiveness of such innovations depended heavily on the existing institutional frameworks through which information flowed.

Compared to modern intelligence agencies, the largest operational drawback faced by the Arab Bureau was, of course, the limited technological resources then available. Even so, as has been noted, they not only drew on the latest technologies of their day but did so keenly and with alacrity. For validation of this argument one only has to see Mohs' work on the subject, whose subtitle – *the first modern intelligence war* – augments the point.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Bayly, *Empire and Information* (1996), 3.

³⁰⁴ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857* (2010), 128.

³⁰⁵ Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?' (1982), 67.

³⁰⁶ Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt* (2008).

In part, the Arab Bureau's own technological context was shaped by recent developments in communications technology. The Crimean War (1853-1856) had demonstrated both the potential and limitations of telegraph communications in warfare. During that conflict, news had taken five days to travel from the Crimean Peninsula to London, hampering military intelligence operations. By the First World War, however, wireless communication had transformed these possibilities, though implementing such technologies across vast desert regions presented unique challenges. The Arab Bureau made extensive use of signals intelligence, primarily through wireless intercepts,³⁰⁷ which had only recently become possible due to increased reliance on radio communications since the start of the war. However, their innovation lay not in the technologies themselves but in their integration with other intelligence sources. They developed sophisticated methods for combining SIGINT with HUMINT and other sources, creating a more comprehensive intelligence picture than had previously been possible.

Their technological adaptation was particularly evident in their response to regional challenges. Poor infrastructure and vast distances required innovative approaches to communication and intelligence gathering. As such, the Arab Bureau developed methods for maintaining communications across remote areas, often combining new technologies with traditional messenger systems. Such a hybrid approach demonstrated their pragmatic innovation in overcoming technological limitations.

It is also important to state that the Arab Bureau's use of emerging technologies for intelligence gathering went beyond simple adoption. They developed new methods for verifying and cross-

³⁰⁷ Mohs, *ibid*, 125.

referencing information³⁰⁸ obtained through technological means, recognising both the possibilities and limitations of new communications technologies. Their experience with wireless intercepts, for instance, led to sophisticated procedures for evaluating and contextualising intercepted communications.

However, their technological innovation was inevitably always subordinate to their broader understanding of intelligence needs. Unlike some contemporary military units that saw technology as a solution in itself, the Arab Bureau viewed technological capabilities as tools to be integrated into a more comprehensive approach to intelligence information.³⁰⁹ This perspective anticipated modern approaches to technology in intelligence work, where technical capabilities are seen as part of a broader intelligence toolkit rather than standalone solutions.

The Arab Bureau's handling of emerging aerial reconnaissance³¹⁰ capabilities provides a clear example of their innovative approach. Although still in its infancy, the Arab Bureau developed methods for the integration of aerial observations with ground-level intelligence, creating more comprehensive understanding of regional geography and movements. This incorporation of new technological capabilities with traditional methods represented a significant shift in intelligence practices. It is also true that their technological adaptations reflected broader innovations in intelligence practice. The Arab Bureau's emphasis on combining multiple sources of intelligence, from wireless intercepts to human networks, anticipated modern approaches to all-source intelligence analysis. Meanwhile, their recognition that technological capabilities needed to be adapted to local conditions and integrated with cultural understanding represented a sophisticated approach to intelligence modernisation.

³⁰⁸ Mohs, *ibid*, 73.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*.

³¹⁰ Mohs, *ibid*, Chapter 5.

The Arab Bureau's institutional innovations provided the framework for developing equally innovative operational methods. In this regard, their objectives encompassed several key areas: the centralisation and coordination of intelligence gathering in the Arab world; the provision of expert analysis on regional political, military, and cultural dynamics; support for British policy-making; liaison with Arab leaders and movements; and the development of propaganda strategies.³¹¹ These objectives presented significant operational challenges, particularly given the vast geographic scope of their remit and the complex tribal, religious, and political landscape they needed to navigate.

Thanks to their unique organisational structure and technological adaptations, they were able to develop new approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis that went beyond contemporary norms. Instead, they strove to create a comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics, which understanding also spurred operational innovation, emerging as it did from a recognition that effective intelligence work in the Arab Middle East required new approaches that could account for the region's complex cultural and political landscape. These operational methods can also be thought of as representing the synthesis of personnel expertise and institutional innovations, while their approach to intelligence gathering demonstrated unprecedented complexity in combining multiple sources of information with deep cultural understanding. Such integration of diverse intelligence gathering methods marked another significant departure from contemporary military intelligence practices.

It should also be pointed out that their success in developing these methods was particularly notable given the technological and infrastructural limitations they faced. Poor communication

³¹¹ FO/882/2 ARB/16.

networks, vast distances, and the challenges of operating in often hostile territory required constant adaptation and innovation, and their response to these challenges demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of intelligence innovation within imperial structures. The practical challenges of operating in the region are vividly illustrated in Kirkbride's³¹² first-hand account, which details how Arab Bureau officers had to do their best to balance military intelligence requirements with complex local political dynamics. As he writes, "The difficulty lay not in gathering information, but in determining its reliability and relative importance."³¹³ His further observations about their methods of verifying intelligence through multiple local sources demonstrates their innovative approach to information validation.

The Arab Bureau's approach to intelligence analysis exemplifies Marrin's view that, "Effective intelligence analysis requires not just the collection of information but the development of sophisticated frameworks for understanding and interpreting that information."³¹⁴ While respecting Clausewitz's classical definition of military intelligence, as gathering "every sort of information about the enemy and his country – the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations,"³¹⁵ they developed what Odom describes as a "transformative analytical process,"³¹⁶ through which information becomes intelligence, and "raw data into actionable knowledge."³¹⁷ This approach reflects what Hatlebrekke called the "balanced analytical imperative,"³¹⁸ or successfully navigating between immediate operational needs and deeper contextual understanding. The Arab Bureau, its intelligence gathering, processing, and

³¹² Sir Alec Seath Kirkbride (1897-1978).

³¹³ Kirkbride, *An Awakening* (1971), 73.

³¹⁴ Marrin, 'Intelligence Analysis' (2007), 824.

³¹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War* (1832), 117.

³¹⁶ Odom, 'Intelligence Analysis' (2008), 322.

³¹⁷ Odom, *ibid.*

³¹⁸ Hatlebrekke, *The Problem of Secret Intelligence* (2021), 156.

reporting, thus represented not just an innovation in British imperial practice but a fundamental advancement in intelligence analysis methodology.

The Arab Bureau's integration of political and military intelligence represented a significant advancement in operational planning. As is known, Allenby came to rely heavily on this comprehensive intelligence approach, particularly in his 1918 campaigns, with the Arab Bureau providing what Hughes terms "granular understanding of local political dynamics",³¹⁹ which proved crucial for military success. Such integration of political and military intelligence was a marked departure from traditional military intelligence practices.

Their network of local informants ranged from Bedouin tribesmen to urban notables, while their analysis integrated intercepted communications, field observations, and academic expertise.³²⁰ Members of the Arab Bureau with pre-war archaeological experience in the region utilised their professional networks for intelligence gathering, with archaeological sites and expeditions providing both cover for reconnaissance activities and hubs for information exchange. This innovative use of academic networks represented a significant departure from traditional military intelligence methods, and allowed the Arab Bureau to gather intelligence that was often inaccessible through conventional channels, while their multi-source approach to intelligence gathering more generally allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics than had previously been seen.

The Arab Bureau's practical implementation of their novel intelligence gathering methods reveals the sophistication of their approach. Their handling of human intelligence sources

³¹⁹ Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy* (1999), 156.

³²⁰ For instance Sheffy (1998).

demonstrates particular innovation in several key areas: First, they developed a sophisticated system for source evaluation that went beyond traditional reliability assessments. Rather than simply categorising informants as reliable or unreliable, they developed frameworks for understanding how different types of sources might provide accurate information in some areas while being less reliable in others.³²¹ For instance, they recognised that tribal informants might provide excellent intelligence about local movements but less reliable information about broader political developments.³²²

Second, they pioneered methods for cross-referencing information across different types of sources. A report from a local informant might be verified against wireless intercepts, archaeological observations, and market rumours. In each case, examples of reporting in such matters might be found in a single issue of the *Arab Bulletin*.³²³ Virtually every issue of the *Arab Bulletin* also demonstrates their pioneering analytical approach. Unlike traditional military intelligence reports focused primarily on enemy capabilities and movements, the *Arab Bulletin* provided comprehensive analysis that integrated numerous non-military specific factors. Such an approach established new standards for regional analysis that would influence future British intelligence practices, eventually shifting from radical innovation to the norm.

Also, such multi-layered verification process allowed for more nuanced assessment of intelligence reliability. Third, they developed innovative approaches to managing informant networks in culturally sensitive ways. Understanding local honour codes and obligation systems, they created frameworks for maintaining informant relationships that respected

³²¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 5 (18 June, 1916), 'Aden: Position at Lahej'.

³²² *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 'Turkey: The Harvests of 1916'.

³²³ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 'Mesopotamia: Ibn Rashid; Pan-Arabs at Baghdad; According to Frobenius.'

cultural norms while serving intelligence needs. This cultural sensitivity in human intelligence gathering represented a significant advance over traditional military intelligence practices.

The Arab Bureau's implementation of these methods was particularly evident in their handling of intelligence over the course of the Arab Revolt. Their ability to gather and verify information about Ottoman movements, tribal allegiances, and regional political developments demonstrated the practical effectiveness of their innovative approaches.³²⁴

The Arab Bureau's innovative operational methods were particularly evident in their sophisticated handling of tribal politics, with their approach to tribal relationships demonstrating how new intelligence gathering methods could be adapted to complex local political structures. Their approach in this regard exemplifies the view that, "Cultural intelligence requires a fundamental shift from viewing culture as context to understanding it as a primary operational consideration."³²⁵ Their analysis moved beyond simple categorisation to what might better be thought of as "deep cultural intelligence,"³²⁶ encompassing complex webs of relationships, obligations, and conflicts that shaped regional politics. This sophisticated understanding, reflecting Khalidi's emphasis on cultural interpretation in intelligence work,³²⁷ enabled the Arab Bureau to develop more effective operational strategies by recognising how tribal relationships fundamentally shaped regional political dynamics. As such, their intelligence reports demonstrated nuanced understanding of how tribal relationships influenced broader regional dynamics. Rather than viewing tribes as simply military allies or obstacles, they saw tribal politics as fundamental to regional power structures.

³²⁴ See Chapter 4.

³²⁵ Willmetts, 'The Cultural Turn' (2019), 804.

³²⁶ Kumar, 'Seeing like a Policeman' (2018), 135.

³²⁷ Khalidi, 'The Press as a Source for Modern Arab Political History' (1981), 26.

The Arab Bureau's handling of tribal relationships also demonstrated what Willmetts has called "operational cultural intelligence",³²⁸ innovating in several crucial areas. They also developed what has been identified as "culturally informed verification methods",³²⁹ recognising that tribal politics operated through "multiple layers of meaning and motivation".³³⁰ Such a sophisticated approach to cultural intelligence gathering represented another departure from traditional colonial intelligence practices, which often failed to recognise the complexity of tribal political structures and communication patterns. In addition, their approach to tribal leaders went beyond simple transactional relationships, encompassing deeper understanding of tribal honour codes and obligation systems.³³¹ Such cultural sophistication enhanced both their intelligence gathering capabilities and ability to influence regional developments.

The Arab Bureau's work with tribal networks also required careful balance between competing loyalties and interests, recognising as they did that tribal leaders often maintained multiple, sometimes conflicting allegiances as a survival strategy in uncertain political environments. Rather than seeing this as purely problematic, or simply dishonest, they instead developed methods for working within these complex relationship networks. Their approach anticipated modern understandings of how local political structures operate in conflict zones. Any success the Arab Bureau may be considered to have had with tribal engagement stemmed partly from their recognition that tribal politics operated according to its own internal logic, rather than purely responding to external pressures.

³²⁸ Willmetts, *ibid*, 805.

³²⁹ Kumar, *ibid*, 137.

³³⁰ Khalidi, *ibid*, 28.

³³¹ For example *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 15 (10 August, 1916), 'Arabia: Gebel Shamar; Aden; Hejaz'.

As such, they developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding how tribal decision-making processes worked,³³² moving beyond simplistic assumptions about tribal behaviour that had hampered previous British engagement with tribal groups. However, their engagement with tribal politics also revealed limitations in their approach. While they developed sophisticated understanding of tribal dynamics, they fundamentally remained agents of British imperial power. This tension between cultural understanding and imperial objectives influenced both their analysis and their operations. As such, their experience demonstrates both the possibilities and constraints of innovative intelligence work within imperial structures.

The Arab Bureau's work with tribal politics had lasting influence on British approaches to regional intelligence. Their methods for analysing tribal relationships and their recognition of the importance of cultural understanding in tribal engagement influenced subsequent British intelligence practices in the region, while their experience provided valuable lessons about the relationship between intelligence work and local political structures that remain relevant to contemporary intelligence operations.³³³ The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach to cultural understanding anticipated many aspects of modern cultural intelligence frameworks. Their recognition that effective intelligence work required deep cultural knowledge rather than merely superficial understanding of local conditions represented a significant theoretical advance in intelligence practices.

Their emphasis on combining linguistic knowledge with broader cultural understanding went beyond contemporary practice, recognising as they did that language proficiency alone was insufficient for effective intelligence work in culturally distinct regions. Such insight remains

³³² *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*.

³³³ Petraeus & Amos, *U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2006).

relevant to contemporary discussions about cultural expertise in intelligence operations. Lastly in this section, their approach to tribal politics demonstrated particular sophistication. Rather than viewing tribal structures through purely military or administrative lenses, they developed frameworks that accounted for historical relationships, economic factors, and cultural traditions. This approach was exemplified in their analysis of tribal allegiances during the Arab Revolt,³³⁴ where their understanding of complex tribal dynamics proved crucial for military planning and political engagement.

The Arab Bureau's understanding of tribal dynamics and politics would also inform and enhance their innovative approach to propaganda and cultural production. Their efforts echoed what was long ago argued, in the foundational text on the subject: "Effective propaganda must align with existing cultural frameworks while subtly reshaping them to serve strategic objectives."³³⁵ Their approach demonstrated what has been described as the sophisticated integration of propaganda within established social and intellectual networks; precisely, "The success of wartime propaganda often depended on its ability to operate within existing cultural and social networks."³³⁶ By moving beyond simple translation to engage meaningfully with Arab intellectual traditions, we can argue that the Arab Bureau achieved what Oddo terms "culturally embedded propaganda,"³³⁷ creating materials that functioned simultaneously as information tools and cultural products, a novel approach which marked a significant advancement in wartime propaganda operations.³³⁸

³³⁴ For instance *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 26 (10 October, 1916) 'Tribal Situation in Mesopotamia'.

³³⁵ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), 43.

³³⁶ Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State* (1992), 76.

³³⁷ Oddo, 'Propaganda Theory and Analysis' (2023), 219.

³³⁸ See also Chapter 6.

This sophisticated approach was particularly evident in their Arabic language productions.³³⁹ Understanding that effective propaganda required more than linguistic accuracy, they developed approaches that engaged directly with Arab cultural and intellectual traditions. Works like *Thawrat al-Arab* represented complex engagement with emerging Arab political thought rather than simple propaganda. Their ability to produce materials that resonated with local cultural traditions while advancing British interests marked a significant innovation in wartime information operations.

The Arab Bureau's propaganda innovations were shaped by their understanding of regional literacy patterns and social networks. For example, in Egypt in 1907, only four percent of Muslims could read, compared to just over ten percent of Copts.³⁴⁰ Rather than seeing these low literacy rates as an insurmountable obstacle, the Arab Bureau instead developed nuanced strategies for reaching different audiences. They understood that written materials, while directly accessible to only a small, educated elite, could influence broader public opinion through various social and cultural networks. Meanwhile, the integration of propaganda operations with intelligence gathering created a sophisticated feedback loop. Information gathered through intelligence networks informed propaganda content, while propaganda distribution networks provided new sources of intelligence. This synthesis of intelligence gathering and information operations represented an innovation in military intelligence that anticipated modern approaches to information warfare.

The Arab Bureau's success in these efforts can be measured not just in their immediate reception but in their lasting influence on Arab political discourse. Their ability to engage with

³³⁹ See Chapters 5 and 6.

³⁴⁰ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995), 141.

and shape nationalist narratives demonstrated a level of cultural and political sophistication that was unprecedented in British military intelligence operations. However, this sophisticated approach to propaganda also created ethical tensions, and while Arab Bureau members were generally aware of these contradictions they tended to view them as necessary compromises in pursuit of wartime objectives. This gap, between their public messaging supporting Arab aspirations and the reality of British imperial objectives would create long-term challenges for British-Arab relations.

It is worth repeating here that the Arab Bureau's analytical innovation was particularly evident in their treatment of tribal politics. Rather than viewing tribal structures through purely military or administrative lenses, they developed frameworks that accounted for historical relationships, economic factors, and cultural traditions. This approach was exemplified in their analysis of tribal allegiances during the Arab Revolt, where their understanding of complex tribal dynamics proved crucial for military planning and political engagement. Further, this grasp of the realities on the ground no doubt also informed the production of their intelligence reports more broadly.

The innovative nature of Arab Bureau methods is also evident when compared with contemporary intelligence operations in the region. While other powers also maintained intelligence networks in the Middle East, their approaches differed significantly from the Arab Bureau's integrated cultural-military model. For example, French intelligence operations in Syria and Lebanon³⁴¹ relied heavily on existing colonial administrative structures and focused primarily on military intelligence. While French officials cultivated relationships with local

³⁴¹ Laurens, 'Jaussen et les services de renseignement français, 1915-1919', in Chatelard and Tarawneh (1999).

Christian communities,³⁴² particularly Maronites, their approach emphasised political control rather than cultural understanding. French intelligence gathering remained largely separate from academic expertise, despite France's strong tradition of Oriental scholarship.³⁴³ It might be noted on passing that the Arab Bureau also drew on the writings of French agents, including Père Jaussen, and quote them in various issues of the *Arab Bulletin*.³⁴⁴

Ottoman intelligence practices during this period³⁴⁵ provide an interesting contrast, and although a full-scale comparison is beyond the scope of this study, we may make a note in passing. Despite their deep cultural knowledge of the region, Ottoman intelligence services struggled to adapt to modern intelligence gathering methods.³⁴⁶ Their reliance on traditional networks of informants, while extensive, lacked the systematic analysis that characterised Arab Bureau operations. However, Ottoman counter-intelligence proved remarkably effective at identifying and disrupting enemy networks, suggesting that local knowledge could, at times, compensate for technological limitations.³⁴⁷ Allied to the Ottoman's over the course of the war, German intelligence efforts here, particularly through the mission of Max von Oppenheim,³⁴⁸ attempted to combine academic expertise with intelligence work in ways that superficially resembled the Arab Bureau's approach. However, German operations remained largely focused on inciting anti-British sentiment rather than developing comprehensive cultural understanding.³⁴⁹ Their propaganda efforts, while well-funded, often failed to resonate with local audiences due to insufficient cultural expertise.

³⁴² See too Antonin Jaussen (1871-1962) archives; also Mazza, 'For God and La Patrie' (2012), 145-164.

³⁴³ Mazza 'For the Love of France' (2016), 75-86.

³⁴⁴ See also Chapter 4. *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 54 (June), 71 (November), and 73 (December), 1917; and 76 (January), and 98 (July), 1918.

³⁴⁵ Nicolle, *The Ottoman Army* (1994); Parsons, *The Commander* (2016); Tamari, *Year of the Locust* (2011).

³⁴⁶ Özdemir, *The Ottoman Army* (2008); Zürcher, 'Between Death and Desertion' (1996), 235-258; and Lüdke, 'Jihad Made in Germany' (2001).

³⁴⁷ Zürcher (1996); Lüdke (2001).

³⁴⁸ McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express* (2010); Gossman, *Passion of Max von Oppenheim* (2013), 33.

³⁴⁹ Zürcher, *Jihad and Islam in World War I* (2016).

Again, although beyond the scope of this study, perhaps the closest parallel to Arab Bureau methods at this time were Russian intelligence activities in Central Asia.³⁵⁰ Drawing on their ‘Great Game’ experience, Russian intelligence had developed sophisticated approaches to gathering information about tribal politics and local dynamics. However, their operations remained more traditionally military in nature, and lacked the Arab Bureau’s integration of academic expertise and cultural analysis.³⁵¹

Even touching on these comparative examples, it is clear that the Arab Bureau’s approach was sufficiently distinctive, so that while other intelligence services certainly gathered information about local cultures and politics, none combined academic expertise, cultural understanding, and military intelligence in quite the same way. As such, Arab Bureau innovation lay not in any single aspect of their operations but in their systematic integration of diverse forms of knowledge and expertise.

The Arab Bureau’s operational innovations exemplified what Ferris identifies as the crucial intersection between military necessity and cultural understanding in intelligence evolution.³⁵² Beyond recognising this need, of course, implementation is key. As Beach succinctly put it, “The effectiveness of intelligence innovations during wartime often depends on the ability to bridge gaps between traditional military structures and new operational requirements.”³⁵³ Here too the Arab Bureau scores highly. By combining academic expertise with military intelligence needs they created what another author called a “culturally informed intelligence

³⁵⁰ Zürcher, *ibid.*

³⁵¹ Nicolle, *The Ottoman Army* (1994); Özdemir, *The Ottoman Army* (2008).

³⁵² Ferris, *Intelligence and Strategy* (2005), 87.

³⁵³ Beach, *Haig’s Intelligence* (2015), 156.

framework,”³⁵⁴ thereby establishing unprecedented capabilities for understanding and influencing regional dynamics. This synthesis of academic and military approaches marked a significant departure from traditional intelligence practices, creating in the process new models for regional intelligence operations.

The impact and implications of all of these operational innovations extended well beyond their immediate wartime context, both anticipating aspects of modern intelligence practice, as well as demonstrating the possibilities and limitations of intelligence innovation. Innovations in personnel selection, institutional structure, and operational methods had both immediate and long-term implications for British intelligence practices. Their success in developing new approaches to regional intelligence demonstrated the potential for innovation within traditional imperial structures, while challenges they faced revealed enduring tensions in intelligence work. While the Arab Bureau’s immediate impact was obviously most evident in their enhancement of British understanding of regional dynamics during the war, had it not been for their integration of cultural expertise with military intelligence the insights they provided would have been impossible through traditional intelligence methods alone. In terms of intelligence reports the *Arab Bulletin* exemplified this enhancement, providing analysis that went far beyond conventional military intelligence reporting.

The longer-term impact of their innovations was more complex. While some of their methods were initially dismissed as unorthodox or amateurish, many advances anticipated developments in intelligence practice that would become standard practise decades later. The emphasis on cultural understanding, their integration of academic expertise, and recognition of

³⁵⁴ Duyvesteyn, ‘Intelligence and Strategic Culture’ (2011), 524.

the importance of social and religious networks all prefigured approaches that would later be recognised as crucial to effective intelligence operations.

However, while we are right to note the positive – from the standpoint of British intelligence and wider wartime needs – impact the Arab Bureau’s innovative techniques undoubtedly had, it would be remiss not to mention the inherent contradictions. Their sophisticated propaganda efforts, while immediately effective, created expectations that British policy would ultimately frustrate, while their deep cultural engagement, which so keenly enhanced intelligence gathering, also revealed the limitations of imperial intelligence practices. These tensions would influence British-Arab relations long after the Arab Bureau was wound up in the wake of the war.

The Arab Bureau’s ability to develop and maintain its innovative practices depended heavily on its mechanisms for preserving and transferring knowledge. These processes, while not always formal, played a crucial role in establishing new standards for intelligence work in culturally complex environments. The Arab Bureau’s methods for preserving and sharing operational knowledge can be traced primarily through their official publications and surviving archival materials. For instance, the *Arab Bulletin* served a dual purpose, which is to say not only as an intelligence product but also as a repository of institutional knowledge, documenting successful methods and lessons learned.³⁵⁵ Its regular publication and circulation within military and governmental circles, while necessarily restricted, helped disseminate insights into not just successes and other operational insights but also broader insights about the Arab Bureau’s innovative approaches beyond its immediate operations.

³⁵⁵ See comments by Hogarth in *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August, 1918).

The preservation of Arab Bureau knowledge and methods is evident now in the official papers. The archives demonstrate how the Arab Bureau documented intelligence gathering methods, cultural observations, and operational practices. The FO 882 series,³⁵⁶ for instance, contains extensive documentation of Arab Bureau work with tribal groups, including detailed observations about political alignments, economic relationships, and other factors influencing tribal behaviour: also seen throughout the *Arab Bulletin*. Inevitably, however, wartime conditions posed significant challenges to knowledge preservation. The rapid pace of operations, combined with security concerns and personnel turnover, often disrupted formal knowledge transfer processes.

The Arab Bureau's influence on later British intelligence operations is evident in several areas. Their methods for integrating cultural expertise into intelligence work influenced the development of specialist regional sections in post-war British intelligence. Their approaches to source cultivation and management became models for subsequent operations in culturally distinct environments. Perhaps most significantly, their emphasis on combining academic and operational expertise established precedents that would shape the development of area studies and intelligence training programmes.

While the Arab Bureau's successes have rightly attracted scholarly attention, examining their limitations and necessary adaptations provides equally valuable insights into the challenges of intelligence innovation in complex cultural environments. The archival record reveals several areas where they encountered significant operational constraints. Their propaganda work, for instance, had to evolve in response to regional realities. Contemporary literacy statistics

³⁵⁶ FO/882/1-28 ARB; FO/882/16 ARB, 6 January 1916.

demonstrate the practical limitations they faced in written communication strategies. This basic demographic reality constrained the potential impact of written propaganda and intelligence gathering efforts. The vast geographic scope of their operations posed another significant challenge. The distances involved and limited transportation infrastructure of the period inevitably affected intelligence gathering and verification capabilities. While the Arab Bureau attempted to maintain comprehensive coverage of regional developments, practical limitations often forced them to prioritise certain areas and relationships over others.

The Arab Bureau's operational innovations exemplified the crucial intersection between military necessity and cultural understanding in intelligence evolution. By combining academic expertise with military intelligence needs, the Arab Bureau created a "culturally informed intelligence framework,"³⁵⁷ establishing unprecedented capabilities for understanding and influencing regional dynamics. This synthesis of academic and military approaches marked a significant departure from traditional intelligence practices, creating new models for regional intelligence operations that would influence future British approaches to intelligence gathering.

The impact and implications of these innovations extended well beyond their immediate wartime context. While the Arab Bureau's immediate impact was most evident in their enhancement of British understanding of regional dynamics during the war, their integration of cultural expertise with military intelligence provided insights that would have been impossible through traditional intelligence methods alone. The *Arab Bulletin* exemplified this enhancement, providing analysis that went far beyond conventional military intelligence reporting, integrating political, cultural, and social dimensions that were typically absent from standard military assessments.

³⁵⁷ Duyvesteyn, (2011), 524.

The longer-term impact of their innovations was more complex. While some of their methods were initially dismissed as unorthodox or amateurish, many advances anticipated developments in intelligence practice that would become standard decades later. The emphasis on cultural understanding, integration of academic expertise, and recognition of the importance of social and religious networks all prefigured approaches that would later be recognised as crucial to effective intelligence operations in culturally distinct environments.

The Arab Bureau's ability to develop and maintain its innovative practices depended heavily on its mechanisms for preserving and transferring knowledge. The *Arab Bulletin* served a dual purpose, functioning not only as an intelligence product but also as a repository of institutional knowledge, documenting successful methods and lessons learned.³⁵⁸ Its regular publication and circulation within military and governmental circles helped disseminate insights about the Arab Bureau's innovative approaches beyond its immediate operations.

Thus, the Arab Bureau stands as a pioneering institution in the evolution of modern intelligence practices, bridging the gap between academic area studies and practical intelligence work in ways that continue to echo in contemporary approaches to regional analysis and policy-making. Their experience offers valuable insights into both the possibilities and limitations of intelligence innovation within institutional constraints, demonstrating the potential for significant innovation even within traditional military structures. These innovations established important precedents that remain relevant to modern approaches to intelligence operations in complex cultural environments.

³⁵⁸ Hogarth's comments in *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August, 1918).

CHAPTER 4 – INTELLIGENCE REPORTS: THE *ARAB BULLETIN*

In support of the thesis that the Arab Bureau was a more innovative unit of military intelligence than has been previously understood, the next three chapters present evidence drawing on a multiplicity of English and Arabic resources. With the organisational and historical context established, this study moves on to explore the processes of analysing and interpreting data, and the subsequent report writing, as seen through the pages of the *Arab Bulletin*,³⁵⁹ the Arab Bureau's collected secret intelligence reports and one of its most significant, and innovative, contributions to secret intelligence from the First World War. These reports exemplify many aspects of an imperial epistemic community framework, particularly in its integration of academic expertise with intelligence requirements.

Although the *Arab Bulletin* has previously been identified as a valuable source for historians, this chapter offers a novel approach by analysing it through the lens of modern Intelligence Studies. This is the first comprehensive analysis of the *Arab Bulletin*, its content and structure, from such a perspective, which is to say not just examining what was reported but also how this intelligence was gathered, analysed, and disseminated. As such, this chapter examines the *Arab Bulletin* not just as a historical document but also as a sophisticated intelligence product that both reflected and shaped British understanding of the Middle East during a critical period.

By analysing the *Arab Bulletin* in the context of contemporary literature and political concerns means also gaining new insights into the cultural and intellectual milieu that informed British intelligence efforts in the region. Further, by examining the *Arab Bulletin* as a product of

³⁵⁹ References throughout are to *Arab Bulletin, 1916-1919*, Bidwell, ed. (1986); and *Military Handbooks of Arabia 1913-1917* (1988).

intelligence work itself, it is possible to assess how its very structure and approach represented advancements in military intelligence practices of the early twentieth century. Such an approach allows for a much fuller understanding of the *Arab Bulletin*, not just as a historical source but also the product of evolving intelligence practices.

This analysis has been conducted by employing contemporary intelligence analysis frameworks to examine the *Arab Bulletin*'s structure and content, including the five-step intelligence cycle model³⁶⁰ and structured analytic techniques,³⁶¹ such as Alternative Competing Hypotheses³⁶² (ACH). This approach allows an evaluation of how the *Arab Bulletin* presented different interpretations of events and mapped intelligence gathering networks, while also considering cognitive biases in the Arab Bureau's analysis. Further, modern network analysis techniques³⁶³ are applied to map the intelligence gathering networks reflected in the *Arab Bulletin*, while current understanding of cognitive biases in intelligence work³⁶⁴ helps identify potential limitations in the Arab Bureau's analysis. By applying these methodologies to historical intelligence documents, the aim is to reveal innovative aspects of the Arab Bureau's work and trace the evolution of intelligence practices.

The sophisticated approach to intelligence analysis evident in the *Arab Bulletin* built directly upon what Wagner identifies as the "integrated knowledge networks"³⁶⁵ established through the Arab Bureau's innovative organisational structure.³⁶⁶ This synthesis of organisational innovation and operational effectiveness created intelligence products that demonstrated

³⁶⁰ Planning & Direction; Collection; Processing; Analysis & Production; Dissemination. Also Chapters 1 and 2.

³⁶¹ See <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Tradecraft-Primer-apr09.pdf> Accessed 10 October, 2024.

³⁶² Dhami et al, 'The "analysis of competing hypotheses" in intelligence analysis', in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* (2019).

³⁶³ Rawlings and Smith, *Network Analysis Today* (2023).

³⁶⁴ Whitesmith, *Cognitive Bias in Intelligence Analysis* (2020).

³⁶⁵ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857* (2010), 128.

³⁶⁶ Examined in Chapter 3.

unprecedented analytical sophistication for their time. Such operational capability demonstrates what has been termed “effective knowledge circulation,”³⁶⁷ where institutional frameworks enable sophisticated information gathering and analysis. The resulting intelligence reflects what Cooper and Schendel describe as “organizational innovation enablement,”³⁶⁸ where institutional structures directly enhance operational capabilities.

Additionally, this study will consider the *Arab Bulletin*’s treatment of open-source information through the lens of current Open-Source Intelligence³⁶⁹ (OSINT) practices. By applying these modern methodologies and interdisciplinary methods it is possible to not only shed new light on the *Arab Bulletin*’s historical significance but also trace the evolution of intelligence practices over the past century.³⁷⁰

Whatever criticisms have been laid at the Arab Bureau’s door, rightly or wrongly, its birth in Cairo can only be viewed as a pivotal moment in British intelligence operations in the First World War.³⁷¹ At last, Britain had in place a single intelligence unit with instructions to operate as a clearing house for any and all information and intelligence about the activities of the Ottoman foe, where separate battles were being fought on multiple fronts and insufficient information being exchanged between them. As such, this moment marks a metamorphosis in British intelligence activities in the region, moving away from an ad hoc approach towards a centralised, formal, one might say modern, and region-wide approach.

³⁶⁷ Darnton, ‘What Is the History of Books?’ (1982), 67.

³⁶⁸ Cooper and Schendel, ‘Strategic Responses’ (1976), 63.

³⁶⁹ Hulnick, ‘The Dilemma of Open Source Intelligence’ (2010), 229-241. Sun Tzu notes the importance of OSINT in Chapter 13 of *The Art of War*: “Hostile armies may face each other for years, striving for the victory which is decided in a single day. This being so, to remain in ignorance of the enemy’s condition simply because one grudges the outlay of two hundred ounces of silver in honours and emoluments, is the height of inhumanity.”

³⁷⁰ Historical context draws, in part, from Andrew (2018).

³⁷¹ For more background see previous chapters, also Westrate (1992); Mohs (2008); and Satia (2008).

Just as the creation of the Arab Bureau was a response to the previously fragmented nature of British intelligence structures in the region, so too the *Arab Bulletin* can be identified as the written manifestation of this new method. It aimed, arguably successfully, to centralise intelligence gathering and dissemination, providing a comprehensive view of the region that was previously lacking. Almost from the moment the Arab Bureau was formally constituted, it became clear that one of its primary tasks should be the preparation of regular despatches for distribution to key officials in the area. As such, the birth of the *Arab Bulletin* was one of the new unit's first initiatives, demonstrating the importance placed on the regular gathering and dissemination of intelligence reports.

Although the regular production of intelligence reports was not in and of itself an original idea, Hogarth gives credit for the specific architecture of the *Arab Bulletin* to the Arab Bureau's most famous member, when he wrote, in a retrospective of its first 100 issues, "the first suggestion of them having been made by Captain, now Lieut.-Colonel T.E. Lawrence."³⁷² Between June 1916 and August 1919, a total 114 issues of the *Arab Bulletin* were produced, in addition to a number of later supplements, and ten volumes of additional material, the *Military Handbooks of Arabia*. A unique and highly influential intelligence product that played a crucial role in British strategy during a critical, multi-year period of the First World War in the Arab Middle East, the *Arab Bulletin* has justly been called, "a fourteen volume master class in the use of intelligence and hybrid warfare in immediate and long term strategy."³⁷³

³⁷² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918).

³⁷³ Barr (2022). Accessed, 7 October 2024:

https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2022/04/19/the_arab_bulletin_827841.html

The *Arab Bulletin*'s analytical methodology represented a sophisticated synthesis of anthropological, linguistic, and “culturally informed analytical frameworks”³⁷⁴ with traditional military intelligence. In addition, the consistent format, coupled with subtle organisational changes, demonstrated what has been described as the “adaptive dissemination model”,³⁷⁵ balancing standardisation with evolving operational needs. As Marrin notes, this “integrated intelligence analysis”³⁷⁶ approach transcended conventional military reporting. The publication's evolution balanced standardised format with organisational adaptability, demonstrating what Hughes terms “responsive intelligence distribution”³⁷⁷ between source protection and decision-maker needs, establishing in the process analytical practices that anticipated modern approaches to comprehensive intelligence assessment.

The *Arab Bulletin* was written by experts for military commanders and other officials concerned with the Arab Middle East, and the wider world where such events had a particular impact on the region. *Arab Bulletin* contributors were able to assume their limited readership already held not only considerable background knowledge of recent events, but also were literate in terms of any military jargon or terminology that may have found its way into its pages, as and when the inclusion of such language was deemed necessary. That said, one of the strengths, not to say pleasures, of the *Arab Bulletin* is its general lack of exclusionary language and or technical argot. In its place, one finds instead an approachable, yet still frequently erudite, literary style employed by its contributors.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ Hatlebrette, *Problem of Secret Intelligence* (2021), 158.

³⁷⁵ Warner, ‘Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence’ (2002), 21.

³⁷⁶ Marrin, ‘Intelligence Theory Key Questions and Debates’ (2007), 825.

³⁷⁷ Hughes et al, ‘The British Secret Intelligence Service’ (2011), 705.

³⁷⁸ See also Chapter 3.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s analytical approach built upon the Arab Bureau's integrated knowledge networks and organisational structure. Its interdisciplinary team, including archaeologists, scholars, and military personnel, brought unprecedented depth to intelligence analysis at a critical juncture in Middle Eastern history. Emerging as both a reflection of and catalyst for British military intelligence efforts, the *Arab Bulletin* served as a high-value resource that transcended conventional military reporting of the era.

The *Arab Bulletin* played a crucial role in managing competing interests within the British establishment, serving as a central clearing house for information from various sources. By synthesising and analysing intelligence from diverse sources, it helped to create a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the complex Middle Eastern landscape. The task of interrogating the *Arab Bulletin* will be done in three steps; first considering the text; second, the context; and, three, its significance. In working through this process it is possible to demonstrate the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's intelligence reporting duties. This achieved, this study will return to the *Arab Bulletin* itself to enquire what lasting impacts it had on British intelligence reporting and operations, in the Middle East or elsewhere.

For a military unit, albeit one created in the peculiar frenzy that marked the First World War, the Arab Bureau's staff roster, and by extension *Arab Bulletin* contributors, were a uniquely diverse congregation with distinct professional backgrounds and expertise. In addition to military men, contributors included D.G. Hogarth, archaeologist and Keeper of Antiquities of the Ashmolean; the pioneering woman scholar, traveller, linguist, and *anti-suffragist*, Gertrude Bell; and the young scholar, lover of mediaeval romance literature, bastard and otherwise social oddball, T.E. Lawrence. Setting aside any ad hominin prejudice or judgment, they and their

colleagues³⁷⁹ constituted an interdisciplinary team that brought together an unparalleled depth of regional knowledge and analytical skills that virtually guaranteed that the *Arab Bulletin* would be set apart from conventional military intelligence reports of the era, or perhaps of any subsequent period.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s unique position within the British intelligence apparatus is evident from its diverse content and distribution. For instance, to select a single edition at random,³⁸⁰ in Issue 48 we find four main items: an article on the history of Arab-Turkish relations both going back to the Seventh century, and looking forward to possible post-war outcomes; up to the minute intelligence on the Arab Revolt in the Hejaz, including the state of the Turkish garrison at Medina, and the names of Arab tribal leaders recently defected from the Ottomans, coming over to Feisal's side; a piece entitled "Turkish Indebtedness and the Cost of the War", drawing on Ottoman speeches and budget projections; and, finally, a seven-plus page report on "Present Economic Conditions" in Syria and Palestine, detailing everything from the impact of the Allied blockade on imports, the latest issuance of Turkish paper notes, and consequent hoarding of coins by the local population, prospects of the upcoming harvest, and the spread of diseases since the war's start, from cholera, via syphilis, to typhus.

Such a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach to the materials collated in the *Arab Bulletin* ensured that officials across different departments – from Colonial, via Foreign, to the War Office – not only had access to a holistic view of the military situation in the Middle East, but also received an education in an array of other relevant historical, political, and socio-economic

³⁷⁹ Bidwell lists 16 principal contributors to the *Arab Bulletin*, which number does not include informants or more occasional, freelance authors. *Arab Bulletin*, Volume 1 (1986), xxv–xxviii.

³⁸⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 45 (21 April 1917).

trends, which only ensured that these policymakers were better informed than any of their predecessors could possibly have been.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s intended audience was as lofty as its contents, and the restricted circulation list, all high-ranking officials and key decision-makers, underscores its status as a premium intelligence product. As such, it played a crucial role in managing competing interests within the British establishment, serving as the central information clearing house for numerous sources, including the Cairo Residency, Sudan Intelligence, and Army Intelligence. By synthesising and analysing intelligence from these and other diverse sources, the *Arab Bulletin* helped create a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of complex regional concerns.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s distribution list consisted of twenty-five named individuals plus a single copy for the Arab Bureau files,³⁸¹ theoretically maintaining tight control over access to these sensitive intelligence reports. However, security was soon compromised when an Italian attaché discovered a copy at Egyptforce's intelligence section in Ismailia and informed the French attaché. When confronted, Hogarth felt compelled to grant controlled access rather than risk unauthorised circulation.

The significance of what was censored from the *Arab Bulletin* becomes clearer when we examine the strategic implications of these omissions. As Hogarth noted, "The constant wish of the French and Italians to see the *Bulletin* made it impossible for us to discuss certain problems in it at all, and rendered drastic expurgation necessary."³⁸² Westrate's analysis reveals that this censorship was far from superficial editorial trimming but, rather, often contained the

³⁸¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 1 (6 June 1916).

³⁸² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 276.

Arab Bureau's most penetrating strategic analyses. This represented a fundamental shift in the publication's intelligence value. The FO 882 files document this process in some detail.³⁸³ Censored material fell into three broad categories. First, detailed assessments of tribal reliability (precisely the kind of granular political intelligence that gave the *Arab Bulletin* its analytical value) were withheld, since their circulation would have revealed the extent and nature of British human intelligence networks to allied powers whose discretion could not be guaranteed. Second, specific intelligence on Ottoman troop dispositions was suppressed where its inclusion might have compromised the sources from which it was derived. Third, and most significantly for the longer-term impact on the publication, frank evaluations of post-war territorial arrangements (including assessments that directly contradicted the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and other allied understandings) were systematically excluded from the version made available to French and Italian recipients.

As a result, the publication increasingly focused on topics where there was little possibility of controversy with allies, concerning land or other post-war claims, limiting its ability to serve as a frank assessment forum. As Hogarth observed, the *Arab Bulletin's* circulation among various departments, both military and civil, "rendered the task of editing delicate and difficult."³⁸⁴ By 1919, attempts were made to rebrand the publication under new titles, eventually settling on *Notes on the Middle-East*.

³⁸³ FO 882/2 ARB/16; FO 882/4; FO 882/14. These files contain Arab Bureau internal correspondence documenting both the security breach (the Italian attaché's discovery of a copy at Egyptforce's intelligence section in Ismailia, and the French attaché's subsequent notification) and the resulting editorial constraints. See in particular the correspondence regarding restricted circulation of material on tribal reliability, Ottoman troop dispositions, and post-war territorial questions. Cf. *Arab Bulletin* Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 276, for Hogarth's summary assessment.

³⁸⁴ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 276.

Returning to the novel concept introduced in this thesis, of an imperial epistemic community, it can be argued with a high degree of confidence that the *Arab Bulletin*, through its contributors, was the very embodiment of such an idea. If we understand an imperial epistemic community as referring to a network of experts sharing a common worldview and approach to understanding a particular domain – here the Arab Middle East under British imperial influence – then clearly the *Arab Bulletin* served as a platform for this elite, to share knowledge, shape narratives, and influence policy decisions.

Regarding one of this study's central claims for the *Arab Bulletin*, its innovative nature and the inherent value thus imparted via these intelligence reports and the unit that wrote them, this is evident in a number of ways. One is its comprehensive approach to the project, and the editor's keenness to include more than just intelligence reports, as these would have been traditionally understood. Unlike other contemporary intelligence reports, which focused primarily, or indeed solely, on military information, the *Arab Bulletin* gave readers a view of the region in the round, integrating elements of political, economic, and cultural intelligence, as well as items of a purely military bent.

Second is its analytical depth. Unlike, say, reports from Wingate's Sudan intelligence department,³⁸⁵ the *Arab Bulletin* goes beyond mere reporting of facts, instead offering in-depth analysis and interpretation of events, anticipating their potential implications for British interests. Third, in terms of cultural understanding, it consistently demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of local customs, tribal dynamics, and religious sentiments, while also noting, where they occurred, shifts in all of the above. Together this reflects deep, albeit far from flawless, regional expertise on the part of its contributors. The Intelligence Officer (IO) in most other military

³⁸⁵ DUA, GB-0033-SAD.

units of that time would have been an officer commissioned into their particular regiment or corps but in many cases without necessarily any specialist knowledge of the place, people or cultures of wherever their current posting happened to find them.

Addressing directly the question of whether the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrated a firm grasp of tribal politics requires careful examination of the evidence. While Arab Bureau reporting showed sophistication in some areas, significant limitations become apparent under scrutiny. Their approach to tribal dynamics reflected what Westrate identifies as their broader imperial strategy: “Arab divisiveness as the cornerstone on which an innocuous confederation... might be based,” viewing “intertribal hostility” as something that “might be turned to British advantage.”

Coleman’s analysis³⁸⁶ suggests that Arab Bureau assessments often oversimplified complex tribal allegiances, particularly regarding the Rashid-Saud rivalry and the intricate networks of obligation and kinship that governed Arabian politics. The *Arab Bulletin*’s coverage frequently presented tribal politics through a binary lens of pro-British versus pro-Ottoman allegiance, missing the nuanced motivations that actually drove tribal decisions. Hogarth’s assessment of the Wahhabi movement exemplifies these occasional limitations, where “regarded Wahhabism as a potent, atavistic contagion that threatened to upset Arabian political equilibrium,”³⁸⁷ demonstrating cultural assumptions that obscured rather than clarified tribal dynamics. The Arab Bureau’s emphasis on maintaining “a balance of power between Mecca and Riyadh” reveals their instrumental approach to tribal politics, but here too their prioritisation of imperial control does not mean they did not have a genuine understanding of Arabian society.

³⁸⁶ Coleman, *Revolt in Arabia* (unpublished, 1976).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Another mark in the plus column for the *Arab Bulletin* was its adaptability. Over its relatively short lifespan, it was constantly evolving to meet changing information needs, as well as transitioning away from wartime reporting when instead the need arose for post-conflict analysis. Finally, and possibly most tellingly, its interdisciplinary collaboration really sets apart the *Arab Bulletin* from any comparable contemporary intelligence publication. This net benefit was, of course, the result of the diverse professional backgrounds of the contributors, i.e. Arab Bureau members, which allowed for multifaceted analysis that was rare in other contemporary intelligence products.

Viewed in the broader geopolitical context of the First World War in the Middle East, the *Arab Bulletin* takes on even greater significance, informing not only British policy and military strategy over the course of the Arab Revolt, but also playing a hand in shaping the post-war order in the region. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that although *Arab Bulletin* reports on the Arab Revolt contributed, for instance, to British support for Arab independence movements, this support was far from transparent or absolute. Whatever differences of opinion existed between *Arab Bulletin* contributors, for instance over which tribal leader or confederation Britain ought to support and what form any such support should take, it was ultimately understood that this would only occur within strict limits, defined by British imperial interests, rather than anything like full independence for the Arabs.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s approach to intelligence gathering and reporting reflected broader British strategic concerns about Arab nationalism, whether nation-based, pan-Arab or pan-Islamic movements, coupled with the desire to control or direct Muslim sentiment. Indeed, differences of opinion over approaches to this control that were a major source of disagreement between

the British authorities in India and many Arab Bureau staff, rather than the fact that this was an imperial necessity. These themes, which found expression in popular fiction such as *Greenmantle*, also echoed through the pages of the *Arab Bulletin*, demonstrating the interplay between cultural narratives and intelligence work in shaping British Middle East policy.

As such, it is entirely fair to say that the *Arab Bulletin* represented a significant advancement in intelligence reporting for its time. Its comprehensive approach, analytical depth, and cultural sensitivity set it apart from contemporary intelligence products. As this study delves deeper into its structure, content, and methods in the following sections, it will be seen even more clearly how the *Arab Bulletin* exemplified the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau. Questions around any lasting influence on intelligence practices will be approached later in this study.³⁸⁸

One final point before moving on. It has been said that, “The Bureau members were adept at propaganda with *The Arab Bulletin* and later *al-Haqqiqah*.”³⁸⁹ However, with regard to the *Arab Bulletin*, we must challenge this view, and reiterate by way of clarification that it was compiled to provide an intelligence briefing for a small number of named, senior military and civil personnel. Much like an inter-departmental newsletter, the *Arab Bulletin* was neither designed nor intended to have any propaganda role whatsoever. Having settled what it was not, it is time to consider instead what it was, via a more detailed consideration of structure and content analysis.

Over its publication history, the *Arab Bulletin* reflected the changing dynamics of the First World War in the Middle East, and Britain’s shifting priorities and strategic goals there. This

³⁸⁸ See Chapter 7.

³⁸⁹ Williams, reviewing Westrate, in *Albion* (1993), 153.

section provides analysis of the *Arab Bulletin*'s structure and content, demonstrating how it embodied the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to intelligence gathering and dissemination.

The earliest editions,³⁹⁰ were relatively brief, and focussed more on immediate military concerns and updates from the field rather than broader themes. These issues typically open with a summary of recent events, followed by more detailed reports on specific topics. However, as the publication matured, issues became more structured and comprehensive. Later issues, after 1917 and through August 1918, display a more sophisticated organisational structure, with clearer section headings and a broader range of topics covered. For instance, Issue 50,³⁹¹ over 24 pages, provides both a news update on the Arab Revolt from a member of the Arab Bureau on the ground,³⁹² notes on the status of seven tribes³⁹³ in the Aden Protectorate vis-à-vis attitudes to Turkey; and further summaries regarding Muhammed Idris, in Libya, the news from Euphrates tribes, Kuwait, and a recently returned Hejaz mission to Abyssinia, and the investiture of the Ras Tafari³⁹⁴ with the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

Included in the notes on the tribes in the Aden Protectorate is an interesting observation, which serves as an example of how superior intelligence did not translate to what might now be considered an enlightened rule, but instead highlights the deep-rooted imperial goals of the Arab Bureau. A letter from Imam Yahya to the Aden Residency voices the opinion that, "My country has for years been scourged by war and devastation. What we want is peace and to be left alone to repair ravages." Appended in response to this plaintive lament, is the following

³⁹⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 1-7 (6-30 June 1916).

³⁹¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 50 (13 May 1917).

³⁹² *Arab Bulletin*, Ibid: T.E. Lawrence, 217.

³⁹³ Harold Fenton Jacob (1866-1936).

³⁹⁴ Ras Tafari (1892-1975), a.k.a. Haile Selassie, after 1924; Emperor of Ethiopia (1930-1974).

appraisal from Harold Jacob, an Indian Army officer on secondment to the Arab Bureau: “This can only be done by the *pax Britannica*, whatever Arabs may say. Turkish rule – or misrule – once removed, the Yemen will become the prey of various bellicose and grasping rulers, and chaos will reign supreme.”³⁹⁵

Moving to 1919, the last seven issues³⁹⁶ of the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrate a clear shift towards longer, more analytical pieces, reflecting the transition from wartime reports to post-war analysis. A single, 22-page, issue³⁹⁷ devoted entirely to Medina, the lifting of the siege and intelligence gathered from subsequent interrogations of the garrison’s Ottoman commander Fakhri Pasha,³⁹⁸ is especially noteworthy for its handling of a surfeit of complex material, including discussion of various possible political futures in the Hejaz, and Arabia and the wider Middle East.

Throughout its run, the *Arab Bulletin* maintained several recurring sections and themes, which both provided continuity and allowed readers to track developments over time, with back issues to constitute a useful resource for subsequent generations of those concerned with the region, from military intelligence officers to researchers. The most obvious of the areas of regular coverage were military operations, providing updates on the progress of the Arab Revolt and other campaigns in the region. Publication of reports was sometimes hampered by the speed with which those working for the Government presses in Egypt could type up and print copies of the *Arab Bulletin*. As Hogarth once noted, “this rate [four numbers a month in 1916 and

³⁹⁵ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 50 (13 May 1917), 220.

³⁹⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 108-114 (11 January-30 August 1919).

³⁹⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 110 (30 April 1919).

³⁹⁸ Born Ömer Fahrettin Türkkan (1868-1948), nicknamed the Defender of Medina, a career Turkish officer commanding Ottoman forces and serving as governor of Medina (1916-1919) including the defence of the city, 10 June 1916-10 January 1919. As early as Issue 42 (15 February, 1917) an intelligence report refers to Fakhri as, “one of the most able and energetic leaders of the Turkish Army.”

early 1917] proved for a time impossible to maintain, as the confidential work thrown by the General Staff and the Admiralty on the Government Press increased rapidly.”³⁹⁹

A second area followed regularly in the *Arab Bulletin* was tribal politics. As is known, the start of the Arab Revolt did not result in anything like a universal uprising of Arabian tribes. As such, it was not so much general interest as operational necessity that drove the Arab Bureau to produce detailed analyses of tribal allegiances, and to note any shifts in these either towards or away from Britain’s Arab allies. Whether or not any such shifts appeared directly related to the war, the Arab Bureau closely followed inter-tribal conflicts, and the broader local political landscape, always looking for possible connections for how this might possibly impact the course of the war in general, and the Arab Revolt in particular.

Concomitant with this, reports on Ottoman activities were also an area of intense interest and frequently reported in the *Arab Bulletin*. Reports and rumours of Turkish troop movements, tactical changes, strategic shifts, and internal politics were actively sought and studied when located. Any news of attacks against, and the destruction of, sections of the Hejaz railway were obviously also reported, not just for the possible importance of any such attack in terms of restricting the movement of Ottoman men and materiel, but also for subsequent observations around the speed or otherwise of any repairs, deployment of reinforcements, and the impact on morale of both Ottoman and Arab forces, whether positive or negative.

The Arab Bureau’s intelligence operations included a sophisticated understanding of communications warfare that has been underappreciated in previous analyses. Rather than avoiding damage to telegraph lines to preserve Ottoman communications, guerrilla operations

³⁹⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 275.

deliberately and systematically targeted telegraph infrastructure. This forced Ottoman forces to rely increasingly on wireless transmissions, which Arab Bureau and other British intelligence officers could readily intercept.

Such systematic targeting of telegraph lines was a calculated intelligence strategy, severing Ottoman wire communications, compelling Turkish commanders to transmit orders and reports via wireless, and thus providing the Arab Bureau with a wealth of intercepted intelligence. The *Arab Bulletin* occasionally referenced intelligence derived from “information gleaned from enemy wireless traffic”⁴⁰⁰ and while in the absence of particular archival evidence there must remain a degree of uncertainty about what information came from local sources and what came from radio intercepts, such communications disruption nevertheless explains the origin of at least some of the signals intelligence available to the Arab Bureau, for instance regarding Ottoman reinforcements being sent to the Hejaz.⁴⁰¹ This sophisticated integration of tactical operations with strategic intelligence gathering demonstrates the Arab Bureau’s advanced understanding of modern warfare’s communications dimension, where tactical destruction served immediate military purposes while simultaneously enhancing British intelligence capabilities.

It should be noted that the relationship between the deliberate targeting of Ottoman telegraph infrastructure and the resulting yield in signals intelligence is not uniformly accepted in the secondary literature. Mohs, whose study of military intelligence and the Arab Revolt remains the most detailed treatment of the subject, supports the interpretation advanced here, while other scholars have placed greater emphasis on the purely tactical and disruptive rationale for

⁴⁰⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 37 (4 January 1917).

⁴⁰¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 37 (4 January 1917).

attacking telegraph lines, treating any signals intelligence benefit as incidental rather than strategic. The balance of evidence available to the Arab Bureau, including the *Arab Bulletin*'s own references to intelligence derived from intercepted wireless traffic⁴⁰² supports the former interpretation, though the absence of a comprehensive intercept archive for this theatre means that certainty on the point remains elusive.

The Arab Bureau was understandably cautious about revealing the extent of their signals intelligence capabilities. Given Hogarth's comments about copies circulating outside the official list, "the adoption of such a cautious approach appear to have been wise."⁴⁰³ The successful interception of Ottoman wireless traffic provided crucial intelligence on troop movements, supply lines, and command decisions, contributing significantly to the effectiveness of Arab Revolt operations against the Hejaz Railway and other strategic targets.

While not necessarily filed with the same degree of urgency, reports regarding economic conditions anywhere in the Ottoman empire, almost regardless of the source, were also pored over by Arab Bureau analysts. Alert to what could be gleaned about, for instance, drops in food stocks or rates of hunger, even famine and starvation among both military and civilian populations, plus rising unemployment, matters of trade, warehouse stocks, and any breaks in supply chains. Events impact morale, and with any declines on either the home or battlefronts came also the possibility of increased Ottoman desertions. Finally, cultural and religious insights featured regularly in the *Arab Bulletin*, with everything from local customs to religious sentiments studied for possible influence on political and military developments. The *Arab Bulletin* regularly shows apparent ease in synthesising diverse types of intelligence into a

⁴⁰² Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt* (2008).

⁴⁰³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 37 (4 January 1917).

coherent narrative. If only from a journalistic standpoint, one must admire the work of *Arab Bulletin* contributors, and the comprehensive editorial approach adopted, desirous as it was to provide readers sufficient information to understand the region in both detail and in general.

In terms of importance, military Intelligence naturally topped the list, with troop movements, battle outcomes, and strategic analyses always among the most urgently needed insights. For instance, to pick an issue at random, Lieut.-Col. Joyce⁴⁰⁴ provides a detailed account of operations against the Hejaz Railway, including specific tactical information.⁴⁰⁵ Political Intelligence, policy developments, diplomatic manoeuvres, and shifting allegiances are also well represented in the *Arab Bulletin*, and might include reproducing Ottoman communiqués even if – or perhaps especially – when these could be shown to be false. For instance a complete reprint of a 2 September, 1916, statement issued by the Ottoman delegation⁴⁰⁶ in Berne to the German-Swiss Press, which announcement fails to acknowledge their loss of Mecca that occurred two months previously.

Touched on above, Economic Intelligence was a recurring and well-covered topic in the *Arab Bulletin*. An area of ongoing concern to military planners, reports about food supplies, trade routes, and resource availability were all considered vital for an overall strategic picture, whether detailing facts, flagging rumours, or providing best guesses based on available information, and coupled with professional insight. In spite of the pre-war travels undertaken by various members of the Arab Bureau, the Arabian Peninsula alone is so vast an area that much of it was completely unknown to outsiders.⁴⁰⁷ As such, Geographic Intelligence, dealing

⁴⁰⁴ Pierce Charles Joyce (born 1878), regular soldier attached to the Egyptian Army from 1907.

⁴⁰⁵ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 93 (15 June 1918).

⁴⁰⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 25 (7 October 1916), 340-341.

⁴⁰⁷ The *Arab Bulletin* also included accounts of pre-war journeys, such as those of Charles Huber (1879-1884), Issue 72 (5 December 1917), 485-487.

with local terrain, climate, and infrastructure, and mapping routes and water source all proved crucial for military planning, and were constantly in short supply.

Having considered the format, layout, and regular features, it is instructive to turn to look at the evolution of *Arab Bulletin* content, where these shifts reflected changing priorities, in war and peace. The earliest issues focused heavily on the immediate the Arab Revolt, both Arab progress and Ottoman counter-moves, including detailed accounts of specific military engagements. As the war progressed, the *Arab Bulletin* shifts to offering more strategic analyses and long-term assessments, with this broader focus allowing for more detailed political analyses and considerations of post-war scenarios. This was especially the case through 1918, when the outcome of the Arab Revolt was less doubtful than it had been in the summer of 1916, or indeed the winter of 1917. After the war, and the handful of issues published in 1919, it demonstrates a nimble move to post-war concerns, and an increased focus on political developments, economic reconstruction, and regional changes in the balance of power.

This evolution in *Arab Bulletin* structure and content is most evident between early and late issues. While this may come as no surprise, what is notable is that content also shows clear progression in terms of its analytical depth. Early issues are more reactive, primarily reporting events, while later issues are comfortable offering in-depth analysis of complex issues, such as post-war governance in the Arab world. One can argue that this evolution reflects not only growing Arab Bureau expertise, and the changing needs of its readership as the war progressed, but also their ability to adapt the focus of intelligence reporting to meet changing strategic needs, in other words demonstrating an innovative and forward-thinking approach.

Examining how ideas, identities, and social constructs shaped regional dynamics, the *Arab Bulletin* employed what Marrin terms the “constructivist intelligence paradigm”.⁴⁰⁸ Their analysis of Arab identity and its impact on political allegiances demonstrates sophisticated cultural understanding, particularly evident for instance in coverage of post-war developments in Syria. The *Arab Bulletin*’s effectiveness stemmed from its regular publication schedule and comprehensive coverage and demonstrates “balanced intelligence delivery,”⁴⁰⁹ while its clear presentation reflects what Andrew describes as “strategic intelligence communication.”⁴¹⁰

In the same vein, the *Arab Bulletin* consistently considers religious dynamics and the role of religious beliefs and institutions in shaping political and military developments. One such example can be found in a June 1918 issue,⁴¹¹ which offers detailed analysis of the religious significance of various holy sites, and how this impacts political allegiances. Tribal structures are another area of particular interest - or concern. There is frequent analysis of tribal politics and allegiances, reflecting at least a partial understanding of how social structures shape political realities, while also betraying inevitable blind spots.

Thus while it may be possible to offer a detailed breakdown of tribal allegiances in the Hejaz, thereby demonstrating an appreciation for complex social dynamics behind political developments, the extent to which underlying or hidden factors are understood was constrained. Even admitting to these limitations, such a constructivist approach represents an innovative aspect of the Arab Bureau’s work, moving beyond simple materialist explanations to consider the role of ideas and social constructs in shaping regional dynamics, in the process establishing innovative methodological standards that transcended contemporary military

⁴⁰⁸ Marrin, ‘Improving Intelligence Studies’ (2016), 272.

⁴⁰⁹ Davies, *Intelligence and Government* (2012), 147.

⁴¹⁰ Andrew, *The Secret World* (2018), 542.

⁴¹¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 94 (25 June 1918).

intelligence practices. Again, rather than simply reporting facts, the *Arab Bulletin* frequently offers in-depth analyses and interpretations, anticipating the analytical focus of modern intelligence products.

The structure and content of the *Arab Bulletin* reflect the Arab Bureau's comprehensive approach to intelligence gathering and analysis. By integrating diverse types of intelligence, maintaining a long-term perspective, and demonstrating a deep understanding of regional cultural dynamics, the *Arab Bulletin* set new standards for intelligence reporting in the early twentieth century. Its evolution over time, from a focus on immediate military concerns to broader strategic and post-war issues, demonstrates the Arab Bureau's adaptability and foresight, while consistent attention to cultural, economic, and political factors alongside military intelligence provided a holistic view of the Middle Eastern landscape that was also rare in contemporary intelligence products. As such the *Arab Bulletin's* structure and content is testament to the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to intelligence work, anticipating many aspects of modern intelligence practices and setting new standards for comprehensive regional analysis.

This section examines the intelligence collection methods reflected in the *Arab Bulletin*. By analysing these methods through the lens of modern intelligence practices, we can appreciate the sophisticated nature of the Arab Bureau's work, which was very advanced for its time. At the same time, this also signals its relevance to contemporary intelligence operations, anticipating as they did many aspects of modern intelligence practices, and setting new standards for comprehensive regional analysis. The Arab Bureau demonstrated a sophisticated approach to intelligence gathering through the integration of multiple sources, anticipating modern all-source intelligence practices. The use of these diverse sources in the *Arab Bulletin*

is a perfect example of what Ferris⁴¹² identifies as systematic integration of multiple intelligence streams.

Human Intelligence, including field reports and word from local informants formed the cornerstone of their efforts, with wireless intercepts and other technological sources also providing either corroboration or standalone intelligence. The *Arab Bulletin* draws on local informants, prisoners interrogations, and field observations from embedded officers, and their success with HUMINT reflected the regional expertise and Arabic language capabilities of Arab Bureau staff. The practice of anonymising sources while maintaining analytical transparency reflected what Beach terms the “sophisticated interplay between formal and informal intelligence gathering.”⁴¹³ The *Arab Bulletin*’s treatment of source attribution exemplifies the “operational security paradox”⁴¹⁴ – balancing source protection with analytical transparency. Their practice of anonymising local sources while integrating signals intelligence is a clear demonstration of “sophisticated source management.”⁴¹⁵ This layered methodology protected both human sources and technical capabilities while enabling comprehensive analysis.

Sometimes, information garnered from intercepted Ottoman communications is mentioned as just that. Given the absence of any additional archival evidence there remains a degree of uncertainty about which, or how much, information was from local informants and what intercepts. Not keen to reveal their virtually total breach of Ottoman signals the Arab Bureau was understandably reticent to publicise this fact, even within the apparently narrow orbit of the *Arab Bulletin*’s distribution list. Given Hogarth’s comments about copies circulating

⁴¹² Ferris, *Intelligence and Military Operations* (1990), 182.

⁴¹³ Beach, ‘No Cloaks, No Daggers’ (2013), 205.

⁴¹⁴ Ferris, *Intelligence and Military Operations* (1990), 184.

⁴¹⁵ Beach, *Ibid* (2013), 207.

outside the official list, the adoption of such a cautious approach appear to have been wise. While Signals Intelligence was still developing, as Mohs⁴¹⁶ has shown, and which was discussed above, the Arab Bureau made effective use of emerging technologies, utilising intercepted radio messages. The 4 January 1917 issue's reference to "information gleaned from enemy wireless traffic"⁴¹⁷ regarding Ottoman reinforcements being sent to the Hejaz exemplifies their early adoption of SIGINT to corroborate human intelligence.

In terms of levels of source protection, applied here to both human and electronic assets, this vacillates throughout the *Arab Bulletin*. Some sources are specifically cited, particularly referenced to official reports or public statements, while the identities of sensitive sources are generally protected, and simply given as "a reliable source in Damascus"⁴¹⁸ or some similar formula. This balance reflects the Arab Bureau's understanding of the need for source protection in intelligence work.

Like wireless technology, manned flight and aerial reconnaissance were in their early stages at this time, but the Arab Bureau were nevertheless keen adopters of IMINT. The *Arab Bulletin* occasionally referenced intelligence derived from aerial photographs, such as a description of Ottoman defences near Aqaba based on "recent aerial reconnaissance,"⁴¹⁹ showcasing the integration of this new technology into intelligence reporting. Although this nascent technology was marked by severe limitations, the use of IMINT by the Arab Bureau not only demonstrates their willingness to embrace new methods of intelligence gathering but also an understanding of the value of visual information in military planning. Meanwhile, on the ground, and using more traditional methods of recording, all Arab Bureau officers were capable of drawing rough

⁴¹⁶ Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt* (2008).

⁴¹⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 37 (4 January 1917), 6.

⁴¹⁸ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 93 (15 June 1918).

⁴¹⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue (23 July 1917).

sketch maps of terrain, routes, and enemy positions. Such cartographic and drawing skills were customary at the time, and their widespread absence in the toolkit of most people today should be considered a great loss.

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) was another useful source, and the *Arab Bulletin*'s widespread use of this was advanced for its time. Systematically analysing and citing local Arabic and Turkish language newspapers, public statements, and even market rumours to build a comprehensive intelligence picture shows an early appreciation of the value of such a source. Analysis of Ottoman public sentiment through Constantinople's press⁴²⁰ also demonstrates this sophisticated approach to open-source information.⁴²¹

Bringing it altogether, the *Arab Bulletin*'s sophisticated use of multiple intelligence sources can be typified in Issue 98,⁴²² where there is a report that integrates information from field agents in Damascus, intercepted Turkish communications, and aerial reconnaissance reports, together providing a comprehensive analysis of Ottoman troop movements, a multi-source approach that was a novelty in contemporary intelligence products, but which obviously allowed for more accurate and nuanced reporting.

The Arab Bureau's intelligence collection methods were also innovative for their time in several ways, anticipating many aspects of modern intelligence practices. Employing Network Analysis techniques, for instance mapping the sources and informants mentioned across multiple issues of the *Arab Bulletin*, we can visualise a complex network spanning military, political, and tribal spheres, and behind it a sophisticated understanding of information

⁴²⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 48 (21 April 1917), 179-187.

⁴²¹ See also Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

⁴²² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 98 (23 July 1918).

networks which anticipated modern social network analysis in intelligence work. To highlight some key aspects, we should include: the identification of key influencers within tribal and political structures; the mapping of communication channels between various actors; and analysis of relationships between different groups and their impact on regional dynamics. For instance, one issue⁴²³ includes a detailed breakdown of the relationships between various tribal leaders in the Nejd region, effectively creating a rudimentary social network map that would be familiar to modern intelligence analysts.

Arab Bulletin articles often attempted to anticipate future events based on collected intelligence, an analytical practice that aligns with modern predictive intelligence techniques. In approaching this technique in their own day, they not only produced assessments of likely Ottoman military movements based on troop concentrations and supply lines, but also generated predictions of tribal reactions to various political developments, and made forecasts of the potential impact of military operations on regional stability, in other words, guessing into the gaps. For instance, demonstrating an attempt to provide forward-looking intelligence to support strategic planning, their agent on the ground,⁴²⁴ “after coloured adventures in that district”, offered a predictive analysis of how the fall of Aqaba might affect the broader campaign in the Hejaz.

While we have already mentioned the Arab Bureau’s early adoption of emerging technologies, we should also note here that they were also ahead in effectively combining these new technical sources with traditional human intelligence. The successful integration of human and technical sources demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to intelligence gathering. This often

⁴²³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 45 (23 March 1917).

⁴²⁴ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 57 (24 July 1917) ‘Arabia: Hejaz; Intelligence’, report of Capt. Lawrence.

involved the corroboration of HUMINT reports with SIGINT intercepts, in addition to the use of aerial reconnaissance IMINT and other technical intelligence to verify information from ground sources, and the broader synthesis of OSINT with cultural and political analysis. This integration is exemplified in Intelligence reports and Notes contained in numerous single issues,⁴²⁵ which offer a combination of information from Bedouin scouts, intercepted Ottoman communications, and aerial observations, together providing a comprehensive picture of enemy positions.

For all their innovation, the Arab Bureau faced several unavoidable challenges to intelligence collection, many of which remain relevant to modern intelligence operations. To start with, verification of information, where the *Arab Bulletin* sometimes presents open-source information without explicit validation, relying on the reader to assess its credibility, an approach that differs considerably from modern OSINT practices, which emphasise the absolute importance of cross-referencing and verification. Verification challenges also included difficulties with information from remote or otherwise inaccessible areas, potential biases of local sources, and the need to balance timely reporting with thorough verification. These difficulties are sometimes acknowledged in the *Arab Bulletin*, such as acknowledgement that contributors' reports are not always easy to verify, whether these are of a tribal uprising in remotest central Arabia, a common challenge when operating in such a geographically vast and remote environment, or due to the appearance of an alleged proclamation in the Turkish press, possibly fabricated for enemy propaganda purposes.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ For example, *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 71, 72, & 73 (27 November-16 December 1917).

⁴²⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 40 (29 January 1917).

Another area of concern for the Arab Bureau was bias reporting, which reflected cultural assumptions of the time, particularly regarding Arab tribes' attitudes towards Ottoman rule. Recognising and mitigating such biases remains a challenge in modern intelligence work. For the Arab Bureau, issues included a tendency to view Arab motivations through a Western lens, the almost constant overestimation of anti-Ottoman sentiment among certain Arab groups, and a concomitant underestimation of the strength of 'Islamic' ties between Arabs and Ottoman Turks. *Arab Bulletin* coverage⁴²⁷ of the potential for a wider Arab uprising often reflected overly optimistic assumptions about Arab desires for independence, demonstrating the impact of cultural biases on intelligence analysis.

Finally, the question of operational security must be touched on in this section, and the fact that the wide-ranging nature of *Arab Bulletin* reporting sometimes risked compromising sources or ongoing operations. For *Arab Bulletin* contributors and editors alike, concerns included balancing the need to share information with the need to protect sources, the inherent risks of interception of the *Arab Bulletin*, and the potential for reporting to inadvertently reveal British intentions or capabilities. The level of detail provided in some reports, such as Lawrence's activities behind enemy lines⁴²⁸ could compromise ongoing operations, not to mention interlocutors and informants, had the information had fallen into enemy hands.

Intelligence collection methods found in the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrate the innovative and forward-thinking nature of the Arab Bureau's work. By effectively integrating diverse sources of intelligence, emphasising cultural understanding, and adopting emerging technologies, they anticipated many aspects of modern intelligence practices. Their early adoption of both

⁴²⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 45 (23 March 1917).

⁴²⁸ *Arab Bulletin* passim, e.g. Issue 71 (27 November 1917).

SIGINT and IMINT, despite the technological limitations of the time, showcases a willingness to embrace new methods that is crucial in modern intelligence work, while their focus on open-source intelligence, long before OSINT became a formalised discipline, likewise demonstrated a forward-thinking approach to their duties. As such, the Arab Bureau's comprehensive approach to intelligence gathering, combining military, political, economic, and cultural information, set a new standard for regional analysis that continues to influence intelligence practices today. Their long-term perspective and interdisciplinary collaboration anticipated the complex, multifaceted approaches now considered best practice in intelligence agencies worldwide.

In many ways, Arab Bureau methods laid the groundwork for the development of modern intelligence practices. Their innovative approaches to gathering, analysing, and disseminating intelligence in a complex cultural and political landscape continue to offer valuable lessons for contemporary intelligence professionals, while their efforts to create a comprehensive, nuanced understanding of a complex region set a standard that remains relevant and instructive.

This section examines the *Arab Bulletin's* reporting mechanisms and editorial process, applying modern intelligence studies concepts to analyse its innovative approach. By examining the *Arab Bulletin's* evolution, writing style, and content through contemporary lenses, it is possible to gain new insights into Arab Bureau intelligence practices.

Hogarth, the *Arab Bulletin's* primary editor, played a crucial role in shaping its vision and content. His background as an archaeologist and Keeper of Antiquities brought a unique perspective to intelligence reporting, blending academic rigour with practical field experience. Although previously referenced, it is worth highlighting that Hogarth's retrospective in the

hundredth issue⁴²⁹ demonstrated a degree of introspection that was unusual, to say the least, and frames his commitment to ensuring continuous improvement and self-assessment in the work of the Arab Bureau.

The stated commitment to quality writing set it apart from typical intelligence reports of the time, as Hogarth himself makes clear, emphasising the importance of “decent English,” and noting that, “Since it was as easy to write in decent English as in bad, and much more agreeable, the *Arab Bulletin* had from the first a literary tinge not always present in Intelligence Summaries.”⁴³⁰ This focus on clarity and readability anticipated modern best practices in intelligence reporting.

This approach mirrors writing guidelines issued to later intelligence units, such as the OSS, which stressed, “Intelligence reports find their literary merit in terseness and clarity rather than in expressive description. ... All parading of erudition which might have been spared without inconvenience is odious.”⁴³¹ This parallel clearly shows the *Arab Bulletin* as ahead of its time in recognising the importance of clear, concise communication in intelligence work. At the same time, it successfully strikes the delicate balance between accessibility and depth, making it concurrently comprehensible to non-specialists while also maintaining its authority through the provision of valuable intelligence.

This approach was particularly valuable given its diverse, if officially strictly limited readership. By avoiding excessive jargon and providing necessary context, it ensured that its insights were actionable across various domains of British operations in the region. Giving

⁴²⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 275.

⁴³⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 275.

⁴³¹ OSS guide for writing intelligence reports, cited in Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in OSS* (1989): quoted in Lathrop, *Literary Spy*, 89.

readers the opportunity to gain greater education on the region, and in the process proudly letting his academic roots shine, Hogarth even finds time to write, “I am asked frequently whether any, and if so, what, book in a European language provides a conspectus of the actual social and political conditions of Syria.”⁴³² Honouring this frequent request, he supplies two pages of books of possible interest on the subject.

Notably, the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrated a commitment to transparency that was most unusual at the time. For example, when faced with conflicting intelligence, Hogarth insisted on openly acknowledging these discrepancies, believing it better to present the complex realities on the ground rather than oversimplifying for the sake of apparent certainty. For example, reporting on tribal allegiances during the Arab Revolt, the *Arab Bulletin* often presents multiple perspectives, implicitly guarding against confirmation bias. For instance, in analysis around the progress of the Arab Revolt and the potential for a wider Arab uprising, notes and discussion of factors that might influence this or that leader or tribal agglomeration is not seen as out of place.⁴³³ This approach is another example of deliberate efforts to avoid groupthink, consider alternative scenarios, and emphasises the importance of conveying uncertainty and competing hypotheses to decision-makers.

The editorial process of the *Arab Bulletin* is particularly evident in its handling of conflicting intelligence, as we can see in a June 1917 edition,⁴³⁴ which presents differing accounts of Ottoman troop strengths in Syria, and which is partly based on French sources. Rather than choosing one account over another, the editor presents both views and offers a balanced analysis of their implications. Such an approach demonstrates editorial commitment to

⁴³² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 47 (11 April 1917), 164-165.

⁴³³ For instance *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 44 (12 March 1917).

⁴³⁴ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 54 (22 June 1917).

presenting a full picture of available intelligence, and allowing readers to make informed judgments.

For its first two years, the *Arab Bulletin* maintained an almost weekly publication schedule, achieving the crucial military objective of timely information dissemination. Such regularity allowed for frequent updates and revisions, gradually transforming raw data into actionable intelligence. The frequent publication cycle also enabled the *Arab Bulletin* to adapt quickly to changes on the ground, a critical feature in the dynamic environment of the Arab Revolt. While Hogarth served as de facto editor-in-chief for most of the *Arab Bulletin*'s lifespan, the nominal editorship changed hands several times. Lawrence edited the inaugural and ninth issues.⁴³⁵ Hogarth's name appeared from Issue 2,⁴³⁶ establishing the *Arab Bulletin*'s scholarly tone and analytical depth. Kinahan Cornwallis took over from in August 1916,⁴³⁷ and held the role for much of 1917 and 1918, while the final issues in 1919 saw brief tenures by C.A.G. Mackintosh⁴³⁸ and Herbert Garland,⁴³⁹ reflecting the changing priorities of the post-war period.

These editorial changes, while maintaining overall consistency, brought unique perspectives to the *Arab Bulletin*'s content and style, and the diverse editorial backgrounds also contributed to the its multi-layered approach to these reports, anticipating modern interdisciplinary approaches to regional analysis.

Over the passage of time, *Arab Bulletin* content evolved from simple reporting to more complex analysis, reflecting the Arab Bureau's own growth as a unit, its understanding of the

⁴³⁵ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 1 (6 June 1916), and Issue 9 (9 July, 1916).

⁴³⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 2 (12 June 1916).

⁴³⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 17 (30 August 1916).

⁴³⁸ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 112 (24 June 1919).

⁴³⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 113 and 114 (17 July & 30 August 1919).

region, and the changing needs of its readers. This evolution is evident in several areas. Firstly, there is evidence of increased analytical depth in later issues, with more sophisticated assessments of tribal dynamics and Ottoman troop movements, demonstrating growing understanding of the region's complexities, or the demands of its readership for intelligence regarding this, or some combination of the two. For instance, the briefest glance through the *Arab Bulletin* reveals increasingly nuanced and detailed coverage of the Arab Revolt over time, away from straightforward battle reports towards more in-depth analyses of the political and social factors influencing the conflict's progression.

Another obvious area of growth is the *Arab Bulletin's* adaptation to changing circumstances, such as a deft transition from wartime reporting to post-conflict analysis, thereby showcasing the Arab Bureau's flexibility in addressing evolving challenges. This shift is particularly evident in the later issues of 1918 and 1919, where the focus inevitably shifts to considering political and economic implications of the war's outcome in the Arab Middle East. Likewise, we can flag expanded geographic coverage as example of its development over time. While it maintains a focus on Arabia, coverage across the *Arab Bulletin* expands to include more detailed reports from Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, which expansion reflected both the dynamics of the war and the importance of these regions in British strategic thinking.

Before moving on, mention should be made of two final shifts in *Arab Bulletin* coverage, namely economic intelligence, and technological developments. In the case of the former, over time, more attention was given to various economic factors, including food supplies, trade routes, and resource availability, showing an appreciation of the importance of this information in warfare and post-war planning; another way in which it anticipates modern holistic approaches to regional analysis. Regarding new technological approaches, including aerial

reconnaissance and wireless, and their operational impact, reports citing these appeared with greater frequency in later issues, indicating the Arab Bureau's ability to identify and adapt to changing methods of war, and to realise the implications of these for intelligence gathering. In the above cases, the evolution in either content or analytical approaches clearly demonstrates the *Arab Bureau's* commitment to providing relevant, actionable intelligence that moved with the changing needs of policymakers and military leaders during and in the immediate post-war period.

Moving to the question of information security and dissemination, the *Arab Bulletin* was classified as "Secret" and as such was intended for a restricted distribution list, underscoring its status as an intelligence product. This classification reflects an understanding of the need-to-know principle, a fundamental concept in information security practices, then and now. However, as mentioned above, maintaining secrecy proved challenging, as evidenced both by copies of the Arab Bulletin being shared among British departments, and with French and Italian officials also gaining access. Such breaches highlight the perennial challenge of balancing information sharing with security requirements. From a security perspective, the *Arab Bulletin's* practices show both strengths and weaknesses.

While its restricted distribution demonstrates an understanding of the need-to-know principle, the lack of page-by-page classification markings and absence of portion marking,⁴⁴⁰ the process of identifying the classification level of individual paragraphs, would be considered security weaknesses by modern standards. For another comparison, the *Arab Bulletin's* handling of sensitive source information would be considered mixed when viewed through a modern lens.

⁴⁴⁰ Now standard practice with classified documents, this helps prevent unauthorised disclosure of sensitive information, and allows for easier sharing of less sensitive portions of a document.

While it often protected the identities of key informants, it sometimes gave details that had the potential to compromise sources, a practice that would be scrutinised far more heavily in current intelligence operations. For example, reports on tribal activities provide levels of detail that would allow savvy readers to infer the identity of informants, putting those sources at risk. As such, in terms of maintaining security while disseminating valuable intelligence, the challenges faced by the *Arab Bulletin* editors reflect the real and ongoing tension between the need to share information and the need to protect sources and methods.

Viewed through the lens of modern intelligence practices, the *Arab Bulletin* might at times appear to contain more ‘information’ than ‘intelligence’ as these terms are understood today. However, this apparent discrepancy offers valuable insight into the evolving nature of intelligence work and the innovative approach of the Arab Bureau. In the early Twentieth century, the line between information and intelligence was less clearly defined than it is today. The Arab Bureau was operating at a time when modern intelligence practices were in the early stages of evolution, and the professionalisation of intelligence as a distinct discipline was just emerging, which historical context is crucial for understanding and evaluating Arab Bureau practices.

Clearly, the contents of the *Arab Bulletin* reflects an early understanding of the importance of context in intelligence work. What modern operators might classify as mere information was, in fact, vital intelligence that informed British policy and military strategy. The Arab Bureau’s innovative approach lay not only in recognising the value of a broad spectrum of knowledge but also in establishing a means for its collection and dissemination through the pages of the *Arab Bulletin*. In this realm, we are able to highlight the Arab Bureau’s innovative approach in four distinct practice areas. One, regarding information gathering, the Arab Bureau excelled in

the collection raw data from diverse sources, from Bedouin informants to fellow officers, personal, on-the-ground experience to leveraging the latest technological advantages, i.e. intelligence gained through intercepted communications.

Two, the *Arab Bulletin* went beyond mere information collection, instead engaging in analysis and synthesis to create a comprehensive understanding of the regional situation. This analytical approach, combining military, political, and cultural insights, foreshadowed modern interdisciplinary intelligence analysis. Third, building on this, *Arab Bulletin* reports demonstrate a wealth of contextual understanding well beyond traditional military intelligence, indicating a process of interpretation more closely aligned with modern intelligence concepts. Fourth, many *Arab Bulletin* reports included attempts to anticipate future events or actions in the region, which use of such predictive elements was most unusual for the time. While it is true that these predictions were not always accurate, the attempt to provide forward-looking analysis demonstrates an advanced understanding of the role of intelligence in terms of supporting decision-making.

In all these approaches, even while obviously operating within and subject to the constraints and understandings of their time, *Arab Bulletin* reports demonstrate a level of sophistication that set them apart from conventional military intelligence of the era. Further, we can add that in each of these areas the *Arab Bulletin* clearly anticipated modern, all-source interdisciplinary intelligence analysis. As such, the Arab Bureau's approach to handling information and producing intelligence supports the thesis of their innovative nature, and supports the claim that their practices frequently anticipated modern distinctions between information and intelligence, even if not articulated in those terms.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s reporting mechanisms and editorial process demonstrate the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's work, and by applying modern intelligence studies concepts to this analysis it is easier to show that not only was the *Arab Bulletin* an innovative intelligence reporting mechanism but also that it anticipated many current best practices in intelligence reporting. Its commitment to clear, analytical writing, integration of diverse intelligence sources, and early understanding of the importance of context all point to a sophisticated approach well ahead of its time. In many ways, the *Arab Bulletin* can be seen as a precursor to modern intelligence products that combine tactical, operational, and strategic insights with deep cultural and historical understanding. Its legacy extends beyond its immediate impact on British policy, influencing subsequent approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis in complex, culturally diverse regions.

The Arab Revolt provides an excellent lens through which to examine the *Arab Bulletin*'s evolving approach to intelligence reporting and analysis. By tracking coverage of this event across multiple issues it is possible to gain deeper insight into the innovative methods used, its impact on British policy, and its role in shaping understanding of Arab nationalism.

From the start, *Arab Bulletin* coverage of the Arab Revolt demonstrates prescience and analytical rigour, from the first reports on mounting tensions in Mecca and early clashes with Ottoman forces. The outbreak of the Revolt was confirmed within a fortnight,⁴⁴¹ while carefully acknowledging the limitations of the nascent uprising: "We have as yet no information on the strength of the forces of the Sherif of Mecca ... They are all untrained and have no artillery or machine guns."⁴⁴² Such cautious language in these early reports reflects a commitment to

⁴⁴¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 5 (18 June 1916).

⁴⁴² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 6 (23 June 1916).

accuracy, and a reluctance to speculate without firm evidence. The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach is evident in their integration of multiple sources, combining their own intelligence with coverage from the Arabic press. Analysis of reports from *Mokattam*⁴⁴³ and other Cairo newspapers⁴⁴⁴ about the mass hangings of Syrian intellectuals⁴⁴⁵ and systematic starvation⁴⁴⁶ demonstrates their ability to rapidly contextualise developments through diverse sources, setting a new standard for comprehensive intelligence reporting.

As early as July,⁴⁴⁷ the *Arab Bulletin* is not only able to provide comprehensive updates on the progress of the Arab Revolt, but also to flag intercepted German wireless messages, three weeks after the start of the Revolt, denying any outbreak of armed anti-Ottoman activity: "We are in a position to deny absolutely that there has been any rebellion in the Hedjaz at all."⁴⁴⁸ They are also able to make use of first-hand reports, for instance, an "Arab Officer who has visited Mecca reports:- Sjerif's [sic] forces will attack furiously, are wildly excited, waste a lot of ammunition, but contain many good shots. Some ride camels, but most are on foot."⁴⁴⁹ In addition to some brutally honest reporting from a British officer, additional reports from elsewhere in the Hejaz likewise do not lie about the state of affairs, with blunt lines such as, "At Medina things are not going well. ... the Arabs have retired a good way from the Town, which cannot therefore be described as besieged."⁴⁵⁰ These early reports set the tone for subsequent *Arab Bulletin* coverage, which is to say drawing from numerous sources, offering a combination of factual and strategic summaries, i.e. attuned to the broader implications of

⁴⁴³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 7 (23 June 1916), 2: from 19 June, 1916 issue of *Mokattam*.

⁴⁴⁴ *El Ahram* and *El Akhbar*, reported in *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 7 (25 June, 1916), 4.

⁴⁴⁵ See also Chapter 5.

⁴⁴⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 10 (14 July 1916), 'Turkey: Famine', 3-4.

⁴⁴⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 9 (9 July 1916).

⁴⁴⁸ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 9 (9 July 1916), 1.

⁴⁴⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 8.

⁴⁵⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 9.

events but also demonstrating a commitment to delivering hard facts, even when these do not offer favourable reports of the current conduct or prospects for the Arab Revolt.

Military analysis in the *Arab Bulletin* also grows increasingly sophisticated over time. Moving beyond basic reporting of troop movements, one issue demonstrates a nuanced understanding of guerrilla tactics, where the impact of raids is discussed not in terms of permanent occupation of enemy positions, but, rather, for the importance they had in interfering with Turkish communications.⁴⁵¹ By summer 1917, the analysis connected local developments to broader strategy, as seen in coverage of Aqaba's capture and its implications for Ottoman force deployment in Palestine, which they surmised might necessitate a redeployment of Turkish forces, and possible weakening of their positions elsewhere.⁴⁵²

The *Arab Bulletin's* political analysis revealed increasingly sophisticated understanding of Arab nationalism and regional dynamics. Hogarth's analysis⁴⁵³ of Hussein's caliphal ambitions demonstrated acute awareness of both religious politics and potential Western interference, writing, "The general consent of the Arabs will not easily be accorded to any new Caliph unless and until he has proved himself conspicuously powerful without Christian help."⁴⁵⁴ The Arab Bureau also presciently identified emerging post-war challenges, in a series of notes from Lawrence,⁴⁵⁵ Philby,⁴⁵⁶ highlighting competing interests among central Arabian tribes, including Rashid, and noting "the ambitions of Ibn Saud in Nejd do not always align with those of the Sherif."⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issues 37 & 38 (8 and 12 January 1917).

⁴⁵² *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 57 (24 July 1917)

⁴⁵³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 49 (30 April 1917).

⁴⁵⁴ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*, 191-193.

⁴⁵⁵ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 96 (9 July 1918), 245-246.

⁴⁵⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 97 (16 July 1918), 255-256; and Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 277-279.

⁴⁵⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid*.

By 1918, analysis had also evolved to recognise the complex interplay between military success and political fragmentation, and hinting at the limits of post-conflict support for their wartime ally, noting “While the Sharif envisions a unified Arab state under his leadership, other local leaders are increasingly assertive about their own autonomy.”⁴⁵⁸ Such insights were complemented by sophisticated economic analysis, linking the disruption of the Hejaz Railway to both military effectiveness and civilian relations. Forward-looking assessments addressed post-war challenges, recognising that British financial support had disrupted traditional trade routes, and the influx of funds and arms had altered regional economic dynamics.⁴⁵⁹

Arab Bulletin coverage also showed sophisticated understanding of cultural and religious dimensions, setting it apart from conventional military intelligence. Analysis of Hussein’s position revealed this nuance offering, for instance, the assessment that, “The Sharif’s control of the Holy Cities lends significant religious legitimacy to his cause. However, this also places him in a delicate position, as he must balance his role as a religious leader with his political and military ambitions. The recent Ottoman fatwa denouncing the Revolt as un-Islamic has created tension among some religious scholars.”⁴⁶⁰

The Arab Bureau’s innovative analytical approaches included the use of predictive analysis to anticipate major developments, while detailed “Route Reports,” such as Bimbashi⁴⁶¹ Garland’s⁴⁶² survey from Yambo to Abu Markha⁴⁶³ demonstrated early forms of geospatial

⁴⁵⁸ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 96 (9 July 1918), 245-246.

⁴⁵⁹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918), 277ff.

⁴⁶⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 65 (23 July 1917).

⁴⁶¹ Original Turkish ‘binbashi’, also ‘bimbashi’, was the rank of major in the Ottoman Turkish, and later Khedival Egyptian (1805-1953) army (etymology, Turkish *Binbaşı*, “chief of a thousand”).

⁴⁶² Herbert Garland (1880-1921).

⁴⁶³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 60 (20 August 1917), 353-354.

intelligence, combining tactical observations with essential details about water sources and terrain, e.g. “The water at Nakhil Mubarak is clear and good and may be drunk without boiling [...] the road lies between and over very stony foothills for about fourteen miles”.⁴⁶⁴

The *Arab Bulletin*'s practical intelligence directly influenced British military planning and policy decisions.⁴⁶⁵ Early reports of Sharifian successes led to increased British support, evidenced by the deployment of liaison officers and provision of aid, while their analysis of guerrilla operations against the Hejaz Railway,⁴⁶⁶ championed by Garland and Lawrence, shaped British strategy. From early 1918 onwards there appeared a preponderance of reports from North-West Arabia, which intelligence clearly informed the strategic decision-making process, as when General Allenby launched his Syrian offensive based on reports of weakening Ottoman positions.⁴⁶⁷

Coverage of the Arab Revolt in the *Arab Bulletin* also played a crucial role in shaping British understanding of Arab nationalism, which both grew out of and contributed to the expansion of what this research has termed an imperial epistemic community, or a network of experts sharing a view of the region, which worldview they then utilised to forge wider British understanding of and policy towards the Arab Middle East. The *Arab Bulletin* serves as a mirror reflecting the Arab Bureau's evolving understanding of Arab nationalism, with coverage of Arab political aspirations and movements demonstrating a growing appreciation for the complexities of identity and political sentiment. This evolution in understanding is particularly evident in coverage of Hussein's ambitions, and reactions of other Arab leaders to the Arab Revolt. By comparing *Arab Bulletin* reporting on Hussein's claims with the actual evolution of

⁴⁶⁴ *Arab Bulletin*, *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Arab Bulletin* *passim*, Issue 5 (18 June 1916) on, especially to October 1916.

⁴⁶⁶ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 45 (23 March 1917), 'Raid on the Hejaz Railway', 127-131.

⁴⁶⁷ *Arab Bulletin*, notably Issues 77-102 (27 January-3 September 1918).

his statements⁴⁶⁸ we can gauge the accuracy and depth of the Arab Bureau's intelligence on this crucial aspect of Arab nationalism.

Early issues tend to present a somewhat monolithic view of Arab nationalism, focussing on Hussein's vision of Arab unity,⁴⁶⁹ and viewing nationalism largely through a solely anti-Ottoman lens. However, as time progressed, a more nuanced understanding emerges, and later issues show greater appreciation for the diverse motivations driving different Arab groups, and the potential conflicts between various Arab leaders and factions. By mid-1918, the *Arab Bulletin* is presenting a complex picture of competing visions of Arab identity and independence. One issue among others offers analysis that, "The concept of 'Arab unity' has evolved significantly over the course of the Revolt. While initially centred on the Sharif's vision of a unified Arab kingdom, it now encompasses a range of political aspirations. Some advocate for a federated structure, others for a loose confederation of autonomous states. These competing visions will likely shape the post-war political landscape of the region and present challenges for British policy."⁴⁷⁰ This evolving narrative demonstrates the Arab Bureau's role both in the construction and dissemination of knowledge about the Middle East, influencing British policy, even beyond the immediate wartime context.

To fully appreciate the innovative nature of the *Arab Bulletin's* coverage of the Arab Revolt, it is instructive to compare it with other contemporary sources of intelligence and reporting. While standard military intelligence reports of the time typically focused on immediate tactical information such as troop numbers and movements, the *Arab Bulletin* consistently provided a more comprehensive and nuanced picture. For example, where a standard report might simply

⁴⁶⁸ Such as Teitelbaum, 'The Man Who Would be Caliph', in Zurcher (2016), 275-304.

⁴⁶⁹ See also Chapters 5 and 6.

⁴⁷⁰ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 99 (6 August 1918).

state the outcome of a particular engagement, the *Arab Bulletin* offers analysis of its strategic implications, political fallout, and even the impact on local tribal dynamics. *Arab Bulletin* coverage also stands out when compared to press reports, where contemporary reporting often presented simplified or idealised views, whereas the *Arab Bulletin* provided nuance and realism, for instance acknowledging setbacks and challenges, and also providing critical analysis of progress and prospects.

Analysis of terminology used also reveals shifts in perception and understanding over time. Early issues tend to use terms like “the Arab cause” or “the Arab movement” in a general sense, implying a unified Arab identity and purpose. Over time, more finessed language emerges, with distinctions between different Arab factions and interests. Terminology applied to Ottoman forces also evolves, where early issues simply refer simply to “the Turks” later reports offer proper distinctions, for instance between Ottoman regular forces, local garrisons, and allied tribal groups. Such linguistic evolution reflects a growing understanding of the complexities of the situation, reflecting a commitment to nuance and honest reporting.

In examining the *Arab Bulletin*’s coverage of the Arab Revolt we see a compelling case study of the Arab Bureau’s innovative approach to intelligence gathering and analysis. Through its comprehensive, evolving, and increasingly nuanced reporting the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrates a level of sophistication that set it apart from conventional military intelligence. From its prescient reporting on the eve of the Arab Revolt to its nuanced analysis of its long-term implications, *Arab Bulletin* coverage showcases the Arab Bureau’s innovative methods and its role in shaping British policy and understanding of the region at this time.

The accuracy of the *Arab Bulletin's* reporting, where verifiable, appears to have been generally high. This can be in part attributed to the diverse range of sources utilised, including reports from British agents in the field, intelligence gathered from local informants, and intercepted communications. The *Arab Bulletin* also employed rigorous sourcing, frequently noting the sources of information, making clear distinctions between reports confirmed by British officers and unverified local rumours. For instance, one report cites no fewer than eight sources, including a French doctor, a French officer, a member of the Arab Bureau, information relayed directly from Sherif Feisal, and an additional, unnamed Arab source within Abdullah's camp.⁴⁷¹

Such levels of source transparency were advanced and contributed to the *Arab Bulletin's* reputation for reliability. This is not to say that it did not sometimes falls short in explicitly assessing source reliability, a key aspect of modern intelligence reports. While it often implicitly weighs the credibility of sources, it could fall short of the formal source evaluation matrices common in contemporary intelligence products. Such absence of standardised reliability assessments could potentially lead to misinterpretation or overreliance on certain pieces of intelligence.

As previously noted,⁴⁷² one of the *Arab Bulletin's* strengths is its prescient analysis and predictive capabilities, demonstrating enhanced understanding of regional military and political dynamics. However, the *Arab Bulletin* was not without its limitations. Its reliance on certain key informants sometimes led to biased reporting, For instance, the early issues' optimistic predictions about widespread Arab support for the Revolt⁴⁷³ proved somewhat exaggerated, reflecting a likely overreliance on pro-Sharifian sources; that and the hopes of

⁴⁷¹ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 37 (4 January 1917), 3-5.

⁴⁷² The Arab Revolt as a case study chronicling innovation in intelligence reporting in the *Arab Bulletin*.

⁴⁷³ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 9 (11 July 1916).

the majority of the Arab Bureau to see a swift Sharifian success, both for the sake of the Arab Revolt itself, and for later, post-war British political interests, neither of which ultimately came to pass in the hoped for way.

This leads to the matter of bias. Like any intelligence product, the *Arab Bulletin* was not immune to biases and cultural assumptions that influenced its reporting and analysis. While often subtle, such partiality is important to recognise, here shaping *Arab Bulletin* reporting, and thus British high command's understanding of events. One notable bias is a tendency to view Arab motivations through a Western lens, which could lead to oversimplified interpretations of complex tribal dynamics and religious sentiments. For instance, there is often an implicit assumption that Arab tribes would naturally turn on the Ottomans, underestimating the strength of Islamic ties between different ethnic groups, Arabs and Turks.

The *Arab Bulletin's* coverage of the potential for a wider Arab uprising could also reflect overly optimistic assumptions about Arab desires for independence from the Ottomans. This optimism may have been influenced by British strategic interests in fomenting rebellion against Ottoman rule, leading to a potential confirmation bias in interpreting intelligence. Examining the *Arab Bulletin* through the lens of modern understanding of cognitive biases in intelligence work reveals both strengths and vulnerabilities in its analysis. While the *Arab Bulletin* often demonstrates awareness of potential biases, even if not explicitly named as such, there are instances where cognitive biases are evident. In its coverage of tribal allegiances for example, the *Arab Bulletin* frequently presents multiple perspectives, implicitly guarding against confirmation bias.

However, there are also instances where mirror-imaging – the projection of one’s own cultural values onto others - is also evident, particularly in assumptions about the motivations of Arab leaders. Considering the case study of Arab Bureau analysis of the potential for a wider uprising, the *Arab Bulletin* considers various factors that might influence tribal groupings. Such an approach clearly shows an attempt to avoid groupthink, and consider alternative scenarios, aligning with modern analytical best practices. However, the same issue also reveals hints of availability bias, giving more weight to recent, dramatic events in predicting future developments.

Clear presentation, evidenced by Hogarth’s emphasis on “decent English” and readability noted above made it accessible to a range of readers, while the combination of consistent production, analytical depth, and accessible presentation represented a significant innovation in military intelligence dissemination, establishing new standards for operational effectiveness in intelligence reporting.

Another factor that guaranteed the *Arab Bulletin*’s effectiveness was its operational relevance, with many reports directly related to ongoing or planned operations, for instance providing information about routes, water supplies, or enemy dispositions, highlighting its practical value for military planners. There also is value to be found in its having a strategic outlook, particularly in later issues when it increasingly demonstrates more focus on long-term strategic implications, not just immediate tactical concerns. Such an evolution suggests that the *Arab Bulletin* was developing into a tool for planning as well as tactical information that, had the Arab Bureau not been wound up, would have been a valuable asset for British officials in the post-war era.

Compared to other contemporary British intelligence products,⁴⁷⁴ the *Arab Bulletin* stands out for its analytical depth and strategic utility, and demonstrating its relative analytical depth and strategic utility. Its interdisciplinary approach, combining military, political, economic, and cultural intelligence, was particularly innovative, compared to contemporary reports' primary or sole focus on military information. Moreover, its attempts at predictive analysis, albeit sometimes biased, were more advanced than its contemporaries. Similarly, its efforts to anticipate future developments based on current intelligence foreshadowed modern predictive intelligence techniques.

The *Arab Bulletin* also reflects many of the innovative concepts discussed in earlier chapters, particularly in its approach to intelligence gathering and analysis, including the integration of diverse sources of intelligence, demonstrating a forward-thinking approach to intelligence work. Furthermore, the *Arab Bulletin*'s emphasis on cultural and historical context in its analysis, often providing detailed background information on tribal structures and regional history, anticipates modern approaches to cultural intelligence in both academia and intelligence circles. Such a rounded approach foreshadowed later developments in area studies and cultural intelligence practices. Further, the *Arab Bulletin* also operates as a showcase for the Arab Bureau's innovative employment of interdisciplinary expertise. As previously discussed, the diverse professional backgrounds of contributors allowed for a multifaceted analysis that was rare in contemporary intelligence products.

Turning to the legacy and significance of the *Arab Bulletin*, this section explores the multifaceted impact of this innovative intelligence product, and argues that these extend far beyond its immediate wartime utility, influencing British Middle East policy, shaping

⁴⁷⁴ For instance, Wingate's Sudan reports: DUA, GB-0033-SAD.

intelligence practices, and serving as an invaluable historical resource. As a historical source, it provides invaluable insights into the First World War in the Middle East, the Arab Revolt, and a particular record of events surrounding the origins of the modern Middle Eastern state system. Hogarth recognised this potential when he wrote, “a complete file on the *Bulletin* since its beginning should be indispensable to anyone who hereafter may have to compile for official use a history of the Arabs.”⁴⁷⁵ His foresight has been realised, as the *Arab Bulletin*’s detailed accounts of tribal politics, its mapping of trade routes and resources, and its analysis of religious and cultural factors provide researchers with a depth of information not readily available in other contemporary sources.

The publication played a crucial role in shaping what this thesis identifies as an imperial epistemic community. This community developed its collective expertise through the *Arab Bulletin*’s coverage of tribal politics, economic conditions, and cultural dynamics, while its approach to comprehensive regional analysis also influenced the development of area studies and regional intelligence practices, where the Arab Bureau’s holistic approach, combining cultural, political, economic, and military analysis, provided a model for understanding complex regional dynamics. Interestingly, such an approach finds parallels in the narrative structure of novels like Buchan’s *Greenmantle*, suggesting a broader shift in how the British conceptualised and engaged with the Middle East. The fact that Buchan, a key figure in both literary and propaganda efforts, later became head of the Information Department⁴⁷⁶ underscores the long-lasting influence of this integrated approach to understanding and representing the region.

⁴⁷⁵ *Arab Bulletin*, Issue 100 (20 August 1918).

⁴⁷⁶ See Chapter 3.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s final issues showcase the publication's move from a wartime intelligence product to a sophisticated tool for post-conflict analysis. Although, in the wake of the closure of the Arab Bureau, the final outcome of this shift in reporting and style must remain unknown, the fact that this transition was taking place underscores this thesis' wider argument.

Concluding this section on the *Arab Bulletin*'s legacy, it is clear that such is evident in its influence on British policy; its value as a historical source; and its impact on the development of intelligence practices and area studies. Its comprehensive, nuanced approach to understanding the Middle East set a standard that continues to inform scholarly and strategic engagement.

This chapter has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the *Arab Bulletin*, examining its 114 issues in part through the lens of modern intelligence studies, which has revealed new insights into the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau's work. The *Arab Bulletin* emerges not merely as a historical document, but as a sophisticated intelligence product that in many ways anticipated current best practices in intelligence work. Its comprehensive scope, analytical depth, and cultural sensitivity set it apart from contemporary intelligence reports and established new standards for regional analysis.

Key findings include its comprehensive approach to intelligence reporting, and its consistent integration of military, political, economic, and cultural intelligence to provide a well-rounded view of the region and events. In terms of analytical sophistication, the *Arab Bulletin* undergoes a process of evolution from mainly reporting events to offering in-depth analysis and predictions that demonstrate the Arab Bureau's growing expertise and adaptability. Such analytical depth was particularly evident in its coverage of the Arab Revolt, where it provided

nuanced assessments of complex political and military developments. Its consistent attention to cultural and religious factors in its analysis showcased a level of cultural intelligence ahead of its time, while the constant integration of diverse intelligence sources demonstrates further innovative approaches to intelligence for the time.

The significance of what was censored from the *Arab Bulletin* has proven particularly revealing, demonstrating how Allied intelligence-sharing requirements fundamentally altered the publication's strategic value. The systematic exclusion of material that might compromise sources or contradict official Allied agreements rendered the *Arab Bulletin* less effective as a frank assessment forum, highlighting the perennial tension between intelligence sharing and operational security.

Critical examination of the Arab Bureau's understanding of tribal politics reveals both sophistication and significant limitations. While their reporting showed analytical depth in some areas, it often oversimplified complex tribal dynamics through a binary lens of pro-British versus pro-Ottoman allegiance, missing the nuanced motivations that actually drove tribal decisions. This instrumental approach to tribal politics, prioritising imperial control over genuine understanding, represents a crucial limitation in their regional expertise.

The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach to communications warfare, including the deliberate targeting of Ottoman telegraph lines to force greater reliance on interceptable radio communications, demonstrates an advanced understanding of the integration between tactical operations and strategic intelligence gathering. This systematic approach to signals intelligence, while carefully concealed in the *Arab Bulletin's* pages, provided crucial intelligence on Ottoman troop movements and strategic planning.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s approach to understanding and reporting on Arab nationalism has also been identified as noteworthy, given its coverage moves from seemingly simplistic views to nuanced analyses that recognised the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, aspirations within the Arab world. This evolution reflects a constructivist approach to understanding nationalism, recognising it as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon rather than a fixed, primordial identity.

Rather than viewing the *Arab Bulletin*'s content as falling short of modern standards, we should recognise it as a pioneering effort, an important move towards more comprehensive regional intelligence gathering, and the *Arab Bureau*'s work more generally as a crucial step in the development of intelligence practices, bridging the gap between traditional information gathering and modern, analytical intelligence work. The *Arab Bulletin*'s legacy is particularly evident in its anticipation of modern intelligence practices. Its integration of diverse types of intelligence, its emphasis on cultural understanding, and its attempts at predictive analysis set standards that remain relevant in contemporary intelligence work.

The *Arab Bulletin*'s innovative approach extended across multiple dimensions of intelligence practice. Its sophisticated integration of human intelligence, signals intelligence, imagery intelligence, and open-source intelligence anticipated modern all-source analysis by several decades. The publication's emphasis on cultural context and constructivist analysis of regional dynamics established methodological approaches that transcended contemporary military intelligence practices. Its commitment to analytical transparency, including the acknowledgment of conflicting intelligence and uncertainty, demonstrated editorial practices that anticipated modern intelligence standards.

However, this analysis has also revealed certain limitations that temper assessments of the Arab Bureau's capabilities. Their understanding of tribal politics, while significant, and certainly more sophisticated than conventional military intelligence, often remained instrumentalist and culturally biased, albeit because it was to be used in the service of the British imperial aims, and the pursuit of wartime goals. The publication's optimistic assumptions about Arab desires for independence, influenced by strategic interests rather than objective analysis, demonstrate the impact of cognitive biases on intelligence assessment. The tension between comprehensive reporting and operational security, evident in the censorship required for Allied intelligence sharing, highlights enduring challenges in intelligence dissemination.

In conclusion, analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* has revealed another genuinely innovative facet of the Arab Bureau's work. Not only was the *Arab Bulletin* a product of its time but in many ways ahead of it, anticipating developments in intelligence practices, area studies, and approaches to understanding complex regional dynamics. Its legacy is evident not only in its influence on British Middle East policy during and after the First World War but also in the later evolution of intelligence practices. The *Arab Bulletin* represented what Herman identifies as a crucial advancement in intelligence reporting methodology,⁴⁷⁷ demonstrating sophisticated integration of multiple intelligence streams with cultural analysis. Such an approach built upon what Hall terms the "deep cultural competence"⁴⁷⁸ developed through the Arab Bureau's innovative personnel practices,⁴⁷⁹ while its treatment of cultural factors anticipated what Willmetts terms "culturally integrated intelligence operations."⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Herman, *Intelligence Power* (1996), 143.

⁴⁷⁸ Hall, *Beyond Culture* (1976), 30.

⁴⁷⁹ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁸⁰ Willmetts, 'The cultural turn in intelligence studies' (2019), 805.

The publication's sophisticated approach to source integration and analysis demonstrate what Beach identified as the complex interplay between formal and informal intelligence networks.⁴⁸¹ Their handling of cultural intelligence, particularly evident in their treatment of tribal politics and regional dynamics, represents what Thomas describes as "operationalized cultural understanding."⁴⁸² The theoretical implications of the *Arab Bulletin's* innovations extend across multiple dimensions of intelligence practice. Their successful integration of diverse sources and analytical approaches exemplified what Marrin identifies as the "constructivist intelligence paradigm,"⁴⁸³ while, as we have seen, their sophisticated treatment of cultural factors demonstrated what Whitesmith terms "structured cultural analysis."⁴⁸⁴

The *Arab Bulletin* thus stands as more than just a historical intelligence product; it represents what has been described as successful innovation in intelligence methodology.⁴⁸⁵ This transformation process was enabled by the Arab Bureau's unique organisational structure, and allowed the creation of intelligence products that transcended contemporary military reporting standards. Its comprehensive reporting and analysis directly influenced British policy in the Middle East, shaping decisions on military strategy, political engagement, and post-war planning. Taken together, these findings strongly support the argument around the innovative nature of the Arab Bureau, with the *Arab Bulletin* exemplifying this.

Subsequent chapters in this study will make use of the insights gained from this analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* to inform a broader understanding of the Arab Bureau's impact and legacy, and also explore how these shaped the post-war landscape, and continue to resonate in

⁴⁸¹ Beach, 'No Cloaks, No Daggers' (2013), 205.

⁴⁸² Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007), 156.

⁴⁸³ Marrin, 'Improving Intelligence Studies' (2016), 272.

⁴⁸⁴ Whitesmith, *Cognitive Bias in Intelligence Analysis* (2020), 145.

⁴⁸⁵ Davies, *Intelligence and Government* (2012), 142.

contemporary approaches to understanding and engaging with the complex realities of the Middle East. An important final point of note is that while the Arab Bureau was tasked with creating propaganda in Arabic, the *Arab Bulletin* itself studiously avoids the term ‘propaganda’ in connection with its own activities, barring the very rare example. The few mentions of propaganda in the *Arab Bulletin* are entirely negative, referring to German and Ottoman Turkish efforts. This careful use of language reflects the Arab Bureau’s awareness of the power of words and its desire to present its intelligence product as objective and authoritative. To address this point more fully, our next two chapters hone in on the Arab Bureau’s Arab language propaganda outputs.

CHAPTER 5 – ARABIC PROPAGANDA: THE CASE OF *THAWRAT al-ARAB*

While the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrated Arab Bureau innovations in English-language intelligence reporting, their Arabic propaganda efforts reveal equally significant innovations in cross-cultural communication and influence operations. This sophisticated propaganda work further supports the argument about the Arab Bureau's unique approach.

On 9 December 1916, in Cairo, a monolingual Arabic book entitled *Thawrat al-Arab*⁴⁸⁶ (*The Arab Revolt*) was published, with an initial print run of 500 copies.⁴⁸⁷ At 250-pages, roughly 85,000 words, it is a substantial literary effort by any measure. Of particular interest is the fact that it was, from conception to distribution, a work that came into being through the efforts of the Arab Bureau. As such, *Thawrat al-Arab* is a work of singular importance, and a lengthy work of literary propaganda that has previously been overlooked by scholars. In fact, it does not receive a single mention in any of the three main scholarly works on the Arab Bureau.⁴⁸⁸ As such, it merits a careful and detailed explication of its contents, and an appraisal of its worth.

Indeed, the Arab Bureau's engagement with propaganda in Arabic more broadly has received scant attention, and so will be the subject of the next two chapters. To approach this systematically, the examination and assessment of these materials will proceed in three stages. First, a consideration of textual and pictorial materials, and literary or other visual artifacts, providing detailed source analysis: *Thawrat al-Arab* is the focus of this chapter; Chapter 6 will address shorter Arabic materials, such as pamphlets, newspapers, and proclamations. As far as

⁴⁸⁶ Referred to as 'The Arab Revolution' in the archives, this study uses the current preferred translation *The Arab Revolt*. A literal translation would be *The Arabs' Revolt* which was rejected because the events described in this book are universally known as the Arab Revolt, and rendering it otherwise would place a needless barrier understanding.

⁴⁸⁷ FO 141/817: "Report on "Moslem Propaganda", anonymous five-page memo, 11 February 1917.

⁴⁸⁸ Westrate (1992); Satia (2008); and Mohs (2008).

is possible given archival constraints, this will include examining the background and processes behind the texts' creation. In the case of *Thawrat al-Arab* this will of necessity involve a full discussion around the creation of the book and a meticulous chapter by chapter discussion of the text, outlining and analysing content and context.

The second step will be to reflect on the context to these texts, which will allow the interrogation not only *Thawrat al-Arab* and the miscellaneous other documents in the particular context of the creation of individual texts, but also to do so against the backdrop of the First World War in the Middle East. While the broader milieu of Cairo-based journalists in the First World War, both Egyptians and émigrés, was discussed earlier,⁴⁸⁹ in addition to other contacts, sources, informants, and interlocutors who assisted the Arab Bureau and other British agencies in the conduct of their work in the Arab Middle East, this chapter will make frequent reference to one of those: As'ad Dagher, *Thawrat al-Arab*'s primary author.

The third phase will be to reflect and assess the significance of Arabic language propaganda created under the Arab Bureau's purview. This will cover both materials created internally and those commissioned and or produced by third parties, but which remained under close supervision of British intelligence staff. Another aspect of this final phase will mean engaging with debates around how, if, or to what extent, one can reasonably assert that there indeed exists a valid framework within which to actually measure the effectiveness of propaganda *per se*. Assessing the significance of these written and pictorial materials also means considering it from two distinct aspects. The first being what impact, if any, these propaganda materials had in the environment in which they were designed, created, and intended to influence, whether directly or indirectly, an audience. Second, what implications may be attached to this body of

⁴⁸⁹ See Chapters 1 and 2.

work in terms of its expanding our understanding of the work of the Arab Bureau as a unit of military intelligence, and consequently its significance.

As mentioned, *Thawrat al-Arab* is the sole focus of this chapter, due to the space required to do justice to this lengthy text, while various other Arabic materials will be analysed in the next chapter. This division of materials means that our broader conclusions about the significance of the Arab Bureau's efforts with create Arabic propaganda materials will be more fully advanced en bloc in the next chapter, after an analysis of all these materials.

The Foreign Office report discussing the Arab Bureau's founding⁴⁹⁰ says it was meant to, "harmonise British political activity in the Near East...[and] keep the Foreign Office, the India Office, the Committee of Defence, the War Office, the Admiralty, and Government of India simultaneously informed of the general tendency of Germano-Turkish Policy". The report goes to state that, "The second function will be to co-ordinate propaganda in favour of Great Britain and the *Entente* among non-Indian [see Arab] Moslems (sic) without clashing with the susceptibilities of Indian Moslems and the *Entente* Powers [see France]."⁴⁹¹

Thus, the creation of pro-British and Allied propaganda was explicitly identified as a central component of the assignments to be undertaken by the nascent Arab Bureau. While propaganda may be mentioned second this should not be taken to mean the task was of secondary importance. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that being singled out for particular mention meant that the creation of Arabic language propaganda was of paramount importance.

⁴⁹⁰ FO 882/2, ARB 16/4, 24. Committee of Imperial Defence meeting, Whitehall Gardens (7 January 1916).

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

In spite of this, it remains the single most overlooked aspect of their work, a gap in the scholarship which the next two chapters will approach.

Thirteen months after the above report detailing the establishment and duties of the Arab Bureau, we come across an anonymous, five-page memorandum entitled “Report on “Moslem Propaganda⁴⁹²”. Written by a member of Arab Bureau staff, it opens with a list of propaganda received by the Arab Bureau from London, going on to outline, “Propaganda produced in Cairo”. This is divided into three categories: Newspapers; Special Publications; and Leaflets. The category Special Publications is further broken into four items: a) The Sharif’s Proclamations; b) The Moshi Pamphlet; c) “The Arab Revolution – Its Precedent Causes and Results”; and d) Reprint of Sheikh Rashid Rida’s⁴⁹³ article in the “Manar”⁴⁹⁴. Three of these items – a), b), and d) – will be discussed in the next chapter, along with other Arabic propaganda material.⁴⁹⁵ This chapter will confine its attention to item c): *Thawrat al-Arab*.

The portion of the above memo detailing *Thawrat al-Arab*, reproduced here with original spelling conventions, reads: “The Arab Revolution⁴⁹⁶ – Its Precedent Causes and Results”, by a member of the Arab Society (Assad Effendi Dagher,⁴⁹⁷ Assistant Editor of the ‘Mokattam’).⁴⁹⁸ 500 copies of this Arabic book (200 pages) have been distributed to Basra, Jeddah, Mecca, Khartoum, Tangier, etc.. The book has been much appreciated in the Sudan, whence a demand for further copies has been received.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹² FO 141/817, 11 February 1917.

⁴⁹³ Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Islamic reformer and revivalist, commentator, editor and publisher. Importantly for this study he was also a staff member of the Decentralization Party, established 1913.

⁴⁹⁴ See also Chapter 4. Founded by Rashid Rida, *al-Manār (The Lighthouse)*; 1898-1935), was an Egyptian-based magazine espousing an Islamic political world view, notably supporting a renewed, pan-Islamic Caliphate.

⁴⁹⁵ Chapter 6: Arabic Propaganda: Miscellaneous Materials, and Combined Assessment.

⁴⁹⁶ Herein *Thawrat al-Arab* (Cairo, 1916).

⁴⁹⁷ Herein Dagher.

⁴⁹⁸ Herein *al-Muqattam*.

⁴⁹⁹ FO 141/817, 11 February 1917.

It is noteworthy that the title and author's name appear alongside one another here, so that while this document was composed as a secret memo the particular tranche of files in which it is located have been available for years, and viewed by numerous scholars during that time. The present author did not 'discover' *Thawrat al-Arab*. Rather, while it has been known about for decades, with copies of the text sitting in plain sight,⁵⁰⁰ it has been sadly neglected.

Released six months from the start of the Arab Revolt, *Thawrat al-Arab* was written with two intertwined, perhaps inseparable, goals. The first was to try and win broader Arab support for Hussein's anti-Ottoman uprising, and so, ostensibly, the cause of Arab nationalism more broadly. The second was to attack the leadership and other Ottoman authorities and their policies, with the intention of undermining support for their war effort, and the empire more generally.

To begin at the beginning, *Thawrat al-Arab*'s frontispiece is typical of its time and for this type. *Thawrat al-Arab* is a mix of history, political analysis, polemic, and manifesto, designed to educate Arab readers, and prod them into siding with the revolt. For the most part the cover page contains precisely the sort of information one would expect to find in a text such as this, written for a highly literate, politically-engaged readership. The title and subtitle dominate the head of the page, and are composed in a larger and more elaborate Arabic font as befits a title. The title and subtitle – *Thawrat al-Arab: muqadimatuha – 'asbabuha – natayijuha; The Arab Revolt: Origins – Causes – Consequences (or Results)* – are clear enough to inform a potential buyer what the book is about, or perhaps deciding it is not to their taste, returning it, unwanted, to the bookseller.

⁵⁰⁰ For instance, the Middle East Centre Library, St Antony's College, Oxford.

More surprising is what does not follow the title: the author's name, which does not appear anywhere in the book. Instead, below the title there is an anonymised yet politically charged ascription, "Written by a member of the Arabian Associations."⁵⁰¹ Unlike contemporary readers, the archives⁵⁰² reveal the author to be As'ad Khalil Dagher,⁵⁰³ a Lebanese Orthodox Christian journalist, editor, and author. Based in Cairo for much of the First World War,⁵⁰⁴ Dagher worked for, among others, Faris Nimr,⁵⁰⁵ a fellow enthusiast for the Arab nationalist cause, and the owner of *al-Muqattam Printing House*, which published *Thawrat al-Arab*.⁵⁰⁶

Given that the title unmistakably tells us this is an anti-Ottoman tract, and pro-Hashemite *cri de coeur*, it is hardly surprising the author preferred to remain anonymous. As well as his anonymity, it is equally understandable to find nothing in the text that gives a hint of the book's co-parentage, and the fact that it was sired by British Military Intelligence, and that it is an item – albeit easily the longest, and in this sense also one of the most important – of Arab Bureau sponsored propaganda.

Thawrat al-Arab exemplifies what Taylor identifies as "white propaganda"⁵⁰⁷—material that accurately identifies its general source and motivation while obscuring specific origins. Unlike the 'black propaganda' that would characterise later conflicts, the Arab Bureau's approach relied on plausible authorship and factual content, understanding that credibility was essential for long-term influence. This technique aligns with broader British propaganda strategies

⁵⁰¹ Ar. *Biqalam ahid al-jameiaat al-'arabia*.

⁵⁰² FO 141/817, 11 February 1917.

⁵⁰³ Also Dagher (1860-1935).

⁵⁰⁴ See also Dagher's memoir, *Mudhakkirati 'ala hamish al-qadiyya al-'arabiyya (My Memoirs on the Margins of the Arab Cause)* (1959).

⁵⁰⁵ See Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁰⁶ See Chapters 4 and 6.

⁵⁰⁷ Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind* (2003), 224-226.

during the First World War, which it has been argued prioritised sustainability over immediate impact, recognising that exposed deception would undermine future operations.

Below the title and authorial credentials we read the legend, “The King among the Arabs”,⁵⁰⁸ a reference to Sherif Hussein, titular head of the Arab Revolt, going here by the title he claimed for himself soon after launching his Arab Revolt. In launching the revolt, not only did Hussein finally throw in his lot with Britain and its allies, but also he made an explicit declaration of independence from the Ottoman empire. Of even greater political potency, because it reached far beyond his own rather parochial domains, in the process of this public and acrimonious divorce from Ottoman authority, Hussein was also rejecting their claims to any authority whatsoever over the global ulema, while simultaneously staking a claim of his own to be the rightful heir to more than 1,300 years of caliphal tradition, and traducing the present day incumbent Ottoman sultan for good measure.

At the same time Hussein declared himself “King of the Hejaz”⁵⁰⁹, he also claimed this elevated title was reaching beyond his existing tribal homeland, professing himself “King of the Arab lands”.⁵¹⁰ It is inconceivable that such an important proclamation was made without careful account being made of the language used, and its likely reception: such decrees are after all meant for dispatch beyond one’s own borders, to be heard far and wide.⁵¹¹ As such, Hussein knew full well that his announcement was bound to rankle Abdulaziz ibn Saud,⁵¹² aggravating an intra-Arabian conflict, driven by both differences of approach to religious practices and more temporal claims. This simmering dispute had already witnessed armed conflict between

⁵⁰⁸ *Al-Malik fi al-‘arab*.

⁵⁰⁹ FO 882/1, TOC Series A, November 1916 – HRG/16/69, 15.

⁵¹⁰ *Malik bilad-al-Arab*.

⁵¹¹ It should be noted here that in Islamic tradition ‘king’ was not a title traditionally seen as universally positive.

⁵¹² Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (1877-1953).

the two before the First World War when, in 1910, Hussein sided against ibn Saud, on that occasion choosing to stand with the Ottomans.

The Arab Bureau had no part in, nor as far as we know, foreknowledge of Hussein's intention to declare himself both King of the Hejaz and King of the Arab lands. Had they done so, they would have objected, not least to his making such rash geographical and political claims, guaranteed to aggravate ibn Saud. Confirming this view, an October 1917 aide-mémoire passed by the Arab Bureau to the American Diplomatic Agency in Cairo stated, "... Britain, France and Russia agreed to recognize the Sherif as lawful independent ruler of the Hejaz and to use the title of "King of the Hejaz" when addressing him, and a note to this effect was handed to him on December 10, 1916".⁵¹³ Absent from this communiqué is any hint that Hussein might also be referred to as *Malik bilad-al-Arab – King of the Arab Lands* – nor that any such claims were supported by the Allies.

The creation of *Thawrat al-Arab* represents a sophisticated understanding of how propaganda operates within existing social and political networks. Unlike the Arab Bureau's English-language publications, which functioned primarily as intelligence reports, this Arabic text was designed to exploit what Anderson terms the "print-capitalism"⁵¹⁴ that helps create imagined communities. The book's anonymous authorship deliberately positioned it within established Arab nationalist discourse rather than as obvious British propaganda. This approach reflects an awareness that effective propaganda must appear to emerge organically from the target community's own political movements, a principle that would later be systematised in post-war propaganda studies.

⁵¹³ Mandate for Palestine, (24 October, 1917), 7. U.S. Department of State, Division of Near Eastern Affairs (1931).https://web.archive.org/web/20190525101232/http://education.mei.edu/sites/default/files/mei_library/pdf/6855.pdf Accessed 11 March 2024.

⁵¹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (2006), 224.

Harold Lasswell's foundational framework for understanding propaganda⁵¹⁵ provides essential analytical tools for examining *Thawrat al-Arab*. Lasswell defined propaganda as “the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols,”⁵¹⁶ a definition that precisely captures the Arab Bureau's approach in commissioning this text. The book systematically manipulates key symbols of Arab identity – language, religion, historical glory, and martyrdom – to reshape collective attitudes toward Ottoman rule and Arab independence.

Applying Lasswell's famous communication model, previously outlined⁵¹⁷ – “Who Says What in Which Channel to Whom with What Effect?” – reveals the sophisticated planning behind *Thawrat al-Arab*. Here, the “Who” is carefully obscured through anonymous authorship, allowing the message to appear organically Arab rather than British-sponsored. The “What” combines historical narrative, religious argumentation, and contemporary political analysis in a comprehensive ideological package. The “Channel” exploits both print culture and oral transmission networks in semi-literate society. The “Whom” targets specific influential segments rather than mass audiences, following what Lasswell identified as the “two-step flow”⁵¹⁸ of communication through opinion leaders.

Lasswell's analysis of propaganda techniques is particularly evident in the text's use of what he termed “virtue words” and “devil words”.⁵¹⁹ Arabic-associated terms such *mujahid*, references to “the language of the Dād,” and invocations of the Rashidun Caliphate function here as virtue words, while Turkish-associated terms are consistently presented in negative

⁵¹⁵ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), 9.

⁵¹⁶ Lasswell, “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society,” in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. Lyman Bryson (1948), 37.

⁵¹⁷ See Chapter 2.

⁵¹⁸ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 47-52.

⁵¹⁹ Lasswell, *ibid*, 89-101.

contexts, or “devil words”. The text’s extensive use of martyrdom narratives exemplifies Lasswell’s observation that effective propaganda must connect with existing belief systems and emotional frameworks within the target society.

It must be remembered that Britain was working hard to entice as many allies as possible over to its side. If ibn Saud had not already determined that his forces would remain aloof for the duration of the global conflagration unfolding around them, Hussein’s unilateral declaration virtually guaranteed they would not take an active role in Britain’s anti-Ottoman fight, while Hussein was hailed as the leader of the uprising, and over non-Hashemite Arabs.

After the *King of the Arabs* legend, sandwiched between the title at the head, and the publication history at the foot of the page, is a list, roughly 100 words, outlining the book’s main themes. While obviously a piece of typesetter’s artifice, we have reproduced it here, in translation, for effect and to highlight the book’s outline as per the original.

The European War and the East – The Eastern Question and its Branches – The Arabian
Question and its Role – Arabs and Turks in the Past – The Arabs and the Unionists
– Forming the Arabian Associations and its Reasons – The First Arab
Conference and its Outcomes – Intentions and Tools of the
Unionists – Unionists, Islam and the Arabs – The
Situation Escalates – The Volcano Erupts
– Swearing to Reign over the Arabs –
The Arabs’ Future – A Martyr’s
Testament and a Mujahid’s
Salute

Ten lines arranged in an inverted pyramid, the last line of the original text consists of a single word: *mujahid*, which can be translated as ‘one who strives’, or ‘a doer of jihad’. Whether by

chance or planning, given the thrust and focus of the book, on an armed uprising against an enemy that was variously portrayed as ungodly and enemies of Islam, the term is a fitting coda to the contents. That our attempt to replicate this in English translation closes with a ‘Salute’ does not seem entirely out of place.

While *Thawrat al-Arab* has 12 chapters, this text has 14 entries, only some of which are identical to chapter headings. Broadly speaking, these items more or less match their placement within the book, and as none appears elsewhere, this can be said to take the place of a table of contents, albeit without page numbers: as such, it is not possible to judge here the length of individual sections, which we shall see are wildly divergent.

The foot of the page names Nimr’s publishing firm and the date of publication: “al-Muqattam Printing House in Cairo: 9 December 1916, 13 Safar 1335”. The fact that both Gregorian and Hijri dates are presented side by side without comment speaks to this being common practise at the time. In Cairo, almost certainly more than elsewhere in the Ottoman empire, ostensible or otherwise, contact with increasing numbers of Europeans – merchants, missionaries, educators, soldiers, bureaucrats or other officials – meant that many Egyptians were exposed to the Gregorian calendar as a matter of routine. As such, Gregorian calendar dates and at least a smattering of English words spread out from the army of civil servants across society more widely.

The Dedication on page two is, “To the souls of the nation’s martyrs”, followed by a list of 15 dedicatees “and others.” As with the contents, the typesetter employs an inverted pyramid to list these. Referred to as “the nation’s martyrs”, it is clear these individuals were dead by the

time of publication, victims of war, hanged by the Ottomans in a series of anti-Arab nationalist purges between 1914 and 1916.

The names listed are: Selim al-Jazairi;⁵²⁰ Abdul-Ghani al-Areesi;⁵²¹ Mohammed al-Mohamesani;⁵²² Tawfiq al-Bassat;⁵²³ Jalal al-Bukhari;⁵²⁴ Ahmed Tabbara;⁵²⁵ Rafeeq Rizq Salloum;⁵²⁶ Abdul-Hamid al-Zahrawi;⁵²⁷ Abdul-Karim al Khalil;⁵²⁸ Shafiq al-Moayad;⁵²⁹ Rushdi al-Shamaa;⁵³⁰ Shukri al-Asali;⁵³¹ Abdul Wahab al-Meleeqy;⁵³² Saif al-Din al-Khatib;⁵³³ and Aref al-Shihabi⁵³⁴.

At least nine of the above were executed on the same day, 6 May 1916, when Ottoman authorities carried out almost simultaneous public hangings in Beirut and Damascus. Of those, Abdul-Ghani al-Areesi, Mohammed al-Mohamesani, Tawfiq al-Bassat, and Ahmed Tabbara were hanged in Beirut; Rafeeq Rizq Salloum, Abdul-Hamid al-Zahrawi, Shafiq al-Moayad, Rushdi al-Shamaa, and Shukri al-Asali in Damascus. Djemal Pasha presided over the gruesome spectacle in Damascus, in the city's Marjeh Square, while in Beirut, the hangings were carried out in the square traditionally called al-Burj.⁵³⁵ In both Beirut and Damascus these squares

⁵²⁰ Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵²¹ Beirut: Abdul-Ghani al-Areesi (also al-Arayssi) editor of *al-Mufid* newspaper.

⁵²² Beirut: also Mahmassani.

⁵²³ Beirut: also al-Bsat.

⁵²⁴ Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵²⁵ Beirut: usually Sheikh.

⁵²⁶ Damascus: (also Rafiq) b. Homs, 1891; poet, lawyer, journalist, language teacher (Turkish, Greek, & Russian) author of first modern book on economics in Arabic, *The Life of the Country in Economic Science*.

⁵²⁷ Damascus: journalist and founder of Homs-based newspaper *al-Minbar*, also instrumental in setting up the first Arab Congress in Paris, in 1913.

⁵²⁸ Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵²⁹ Damascus: usually al-Azm also written.

⁵³⁰ Damascus: MP for Damascus in 1908.

⁵³¹ Damascus: MP for Damascus in 1908.

⁵³² Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵³³ Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵³⁴ Not listed under those killed in either Beirut or Damascus.

⁵³⁵ Eng. the Tower; renamed Martyrs' Square (1931), after these events. A memorial statue on the site of the executions was inaugurated (1960), by Italian sculptor Marino Mazzacurati in an unashamedly heroic style.

were subsequently renamed Martyrs' Square, with the anniversary memorialised in both countries every 6 May.

These men were all ethnically Arab, and public figures in various professional fields, including two former MPs for Damascus, in the 1908 Ottoman parliament; a delegate to the Turkish Parliament; lawyers, jurists, educators, poets, and journalists. In spite of diverse professional backgrounds they were all sympathetic to the cause of Arab nationalism, although their demands, and levels of activism, varied. Supporters in principle of Arab nationalism, their divergent personal visions of how this should be manifest were situated along a spectrum, running from calls for more recognition for Arabic and other cultural features, to greater autonomy within the Ottoman empire, to demands for outright Arab independence. By normal standards, none of these men be considered dangerous extremists, let alone revolutionaries, but so often war often subverts the routine. With the outbreak of war some adopted more radical and or urgent demands than had been the case during peacetime.

While knowing that the circle of those active in the cause of Arab nationalism at this time was a small one, it is useful to mention that most of the dedicatees were known to Dagher, and more than a few were close friends. In addition to feeling lucky to have arrived in Cairo before he too could be singled-out, caught, and executed, presumably Dagher also had darker thoughts, depression or survivor's guilt, which emotional tumult one periodically senses in his work.

The timing of the hangings is also important for the wider story of the Arab Revolt, undoubtedly playing a part in forcing Hussein's hand. Hussein was personally affected by news of the executions. As if seeing the writing on the wall, he finally made the fateful decision to break from the Ottomans so that just four weeks after the hangings, without yet having agreed

terms with Britain regarding the range or manner of his post-war Arab kingdom, he threw in his lot with the Allies, and launched the Arab Revolt.

Daghir begins the book proper with a short, roughly 400-word 'Introduction'.⁵³⁶ In translation it is better to think of this as a preface, in which the author offers an *apologia* of the text to come, the opening words of which exhibit a somewhat portentous literary tone, not atypical of much of the book:

“Several centuries have passed during which the noble Arabs have clung to and endured the unfair decrees of time, with noble forbearance in spite of their wounded pride.”

The main thrust of his argument is that after centuries of quiet decline and acquiescence with Ottoman rule the time has come for the Arabs to learn their history, regain pride in past achievements, and to realise their destiny by seizing this moment of revolt: “the public is unaware of certain critical issues related to the past, present and future of this revolution so we decided to collect as much as we can in this book, as the current situation allows, provided that the subject is to be continually discussed soon, God willing.”⁵³⁷

He bemoans widespread ignorance among Arabs, both of their past greatness and the causes of the current uprising. Daghir hopes that in writing about their history, and the current situation, this book will inspire Arabs to show the world that they are worthy of being considered among the world's great peoples. The message here is that the best way to do this is by joining Hussein's revolt. He writes, “His Majesty King Hussein raised the flag of freedom and the Arabs surrounded it with their hearts and souls acting as forts and strongholds for its

⁵³⁶ *Muqaddimah*.

⁵³⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab* (Cairo, 1916), 2. (Page numbers refer to this author's translation.)

protection.”⁵³⁸ Given events on the ground, and the unwillingness of the vast majority of Arabs, both civilians and military personnel, to abandon the Ottomans this last claim rings hollow. That said, while clearly hyperbolic it must be remembered that this is propaganda, and Dagher is doing his bit to sell the dream of an independent Arab Kingdom where one does not exist, and promoting a new, post-war, post-Ottoman world order that the majority of Arabs at this time simply cannot imagine.

A brief summary of *Thawrat al-Arab* here will help guide the more detailed analysis that follows. Chapters One, ‘The European War and the East’, and Two, ‘The Arab Question’, provide historical background about the Ottoman empire, its system of government, and the current wartime state of affairs, focussing in particular on the Arabs up to the eve of war. The narrative opens in 1683, “after the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Kahlenberg”,⁵³⁹ and by the end of Chapter Two has brought the reader to Paris, 1913, and the First Arab Congress.

Chapters Three, ‘The Alleged Agreement between Arabs and Turks’, and Four, ‘The First Shocks’, offer an account of the Arab Congress and its aftermath, from a description of state-level Arab-Ottoman relations, including the appointment of Arab delegates to go to Constantinople after the Congress, the revelations of “Ottoman duplicity”, such as the ban on Arab associations and the trial of the Egyptian-Circassian Ottoman Army officer Aziz Bey Ali al-Masri. Chapter Five, ‘The Arabs Loyalty to the Unionists’, aims to demonstrate what the title’s claim in part through the inclusion of extensive extracts from speeches and letters, wherein various Arab nationalist figures proclaim their devotion to the empire, before most were later hanged.

⁵³⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, *ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Battle of Vienna (German: *Schlacht am Kahlenberg* or the Battle of the Bald Mountain, after Kahlenberg, lit. bald mountain; Turkish: *Alamandağı*) is a mountain outside of Vienna from where, on 12 September 1683, Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland, successfully led his troops during the second siege of Vienna.

Chapter Six, 'The Unionists' Tools to Erase Islam and Crush the Arabs', sees a striking change of tone, the rhetoric becoming much angrier and more pointedly anti-Ottoman. Perhaps most potently, bearing in mind the desired readership, the author alleges a raft of Ottoman policies against the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, "and all that is sacred in Islam."⁵⁴⁰ Chapter Seven, 'Aggravated Sermons', continues in an incensed tone, and tackles recent anti-Arab nationalist persecution, such as the mass hangings. Also in this chapter the author details what one might call 'traditional' propaganda through the planting of entirely false stories, most notably an account of the Ottoman destruction of the shrine and remains of the nineteenth century Algerian and Arab hero, Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi.

Chapter Eight, 'The Volcano Erupts', describes the awful fate faced by the Arabs at the hands of Cemal Pasha, which gave Hussein no choice but to launch his revolt and declare independence in the name of all Arabs. Chapter Nine, 'Europe and Arab Independence', hails European support for the Arab Revolt, and apparently nationalism more widely, and makes claims for how widespread support for the revolt is both among Muslim polities and the wider, non-Islamic world. Included here are details of foreign delegations coming to Mecca, and reprints of pro-Revolt statements, telegrams, and newspaper reports from around the world.

The final three chapters, Ten, 'The King Among the Arabs', Eleven, 'The Arabs' Future', and Twelve, ' "A Martyr's Will and a Mujahid's Greeting" ', offer a vindication of Hussein as the best and rightful choice as a king of the Arabs, with news of the establishment of various Arab Ministries and a Senate, before looking forward to brighter days of Arab independence ahead. Chapter Twelve closes this remarkable book with reprints of two emotionally charged items, a

⁵⁴⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 26.

letter and a poem, both written by friends of Daghir's, leaving readers with a final piece of rhetoric to motivate them to abandon the Ottomans and join Hussein. The first item is a letter by 'Abd al-Ghanī al-'Arīsī, one of dedicatees, while the second is a rousing poem by Fu'ād al-Khaṭīb, which ends with the lines:

March on to Syria, to the land of Iraq,

To the furthest reach of the Peninsula, and carry the flag.

Before closing this brief summary of the text, mention should be made of the division of the material. The first three chapters constitute a little more than a third of the whole text, just over 100 pages, or not less than 35,000 words. The next four chapters, covering the period from the 1913 Congress to 1916 on the eve of the Arab Revolt, form roughly the second third; 90 pages, just under 30,000 words. The final five chapters, eight to twelve, make up under a third of the whole text; 60 pages, roughly 18,000 words.

Given the proximity of events to the date of publication, it is perhaps not surprising that the portions dealing with history and the pre-war background to the Arab Revolt are so much longer than later chapters. Also, as events move closer to the contemporary Daghir increasingly uses the words of others, inserting lengthy portions of text verbatim, sometimes in extract but often an entire speech, proclamation, or letter. Whenever he does this, Daghir is scrupulous in giving credit, even when, as he explains, he is forced to anonymise a contribution, typically because the author is still living under Ottoman control.

Indeed, it can be argued that Daghir's chosen approach not only delivers a heightened sense of urgency, but lends greater weight to the veracity of his argument. Instead of being a sole author, with the potential drawbacks this might imply, including restricted understanding of events, or

personal prejudice, Dagher is instead concurrently author, compiler, and editor, and as such able to bring in the opinions, wisdom, and unique vision of a whole cast of Arab nationalist voices.

Moving on to consider individual chapters in more detail, the first two chapters deal with the historical background to state of the Ottoman empire as it appeared at the start of the war. It is, the author relates in Chapter One, 'The European War and the East' (31 pages; c.10,200 words). Dagher's subheading for this chapter is the Eastern Question, its Roles and its Branches, which 'Branches' are Questions dealing with the Inlets, i.e. the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbian, and Armenia. The story he writes is very much of declining Ottoman power, which imperial deterioration and the attendant struggles for autonomy and or independence in the Balkans and elsewhere resulted in a simultaneous reduction of respect for the Arabs, and other diverse ethnic groups.

Thawrat al-Arab represents a crucial intervention in what Khalidi identifies as the "formative period" of Arab nationalism, when "the Arabic press played a central role in the development of Arab identity."⁵⁴¹ The text's emergence in 1916 coincides precisely with what James Gelvin terms the "crystallization moment" of Arab nationalist discourse, when "local patriotisms began to coalesce into broader territorial nationalisms."⁵⁴²

The book's anonymous authorship and emphasis on pan-Arab identity reflect what Bayly identified as nationalism's dependence on "communities of sentiment" created through print circulation.⁵⁴³ By presenting itself as emerging from within Arab nationalist circles rather than British intelligence, *Thawrat al-Arab* seeks to exploit what Gellner termed nationalism's

⁵⁴¹ Khalidi, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (1991), 78.

⁵⁴² Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties* (1998), 45.

⁵⁴³ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004), 278.

requirement for “cultural homogeneity.”⁵⁴⁴ The text’s extensive genealogical discussions and historical narratives serve what Smith called the “ethnic” functions of nationalism – creating shared memories, myths, and symbols that transcend immediate political boundaries.⁵⁴⁵

Comparative analysis reveals striking parallels with other nationalist movements’ use of historical narrative. Like the Czech national revival’s emphasis on medieval glory or Irish nationalism’s invocation of ancient Celtic civilisation, *Thawrat al-Arab* constructs what Duara calls a “bifurcated history”⁵⁴⁶ – golden age, decline under foreign rule, and promised regeneration. The text’s portrayal of the Abbasid period as representing authentic Arab achievement while dismissing Ottoman rule as foreign oppression follows patterns identified across multiple nationalist contexts.

The timing of the text’s production also aligns with Anderson’s analysis of how “print-capitalism”⁵⁴⁷ creates the temporal simultaneity essential to imagined community formation. By circulating accounts of the Arab Revolt as a contemporary, unfolding event while grounding it in deep historical narrative, *Thawrat al-Arab* attempts to create what Anderson called “calendrical coincidence” – the sense that Arabs across different regions are participating in the same historical moment.

Daghir claims this was partly driven by Ottoman envy of the Arabs’ former greatness and civilisational achievements. Also contributing to Ottoman jealousy was the Arabs being the people whose language was chosen by God to deliver his final revelation. Here and elsewhere

⁵⁴⁴ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), 35.

⁵⁴⁵ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), 149-152.

⁵⁴⁶ Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (1995), 51.

⁵⁴⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44-46.

in the text, Daghira uses the phrase “the language of the *Dād*”⁵⁴⁸ signifying Arabic, while “those who pronounce the *Dād*”⁵⁴⁹ stands for the Arabs themselves, both commonly employed tropes among Arab nationalists in this period,⁵⁵⁰ including Fu‘ad al-Khatib, a prominent Arab nationalism poet, one of whose verses Daghira uses as a coda to *Thawrat al-Arab*.

Moving to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Daghira lays out what he sees as the various Questions⁵⁵¹ that constitute the immediate background to the Ottoman empire’s geopolitical decline, and concurrent increase in European involvement in, and justifiable concern for, the region as a whole. These include ‘The Eastern Question’,⁵⁵² ‘The Macedonian Question’, ‘The Albanian Question’, ‘The Bosnia and Herzegovinian Question’, ‘The Serbian Question’, ‘The Armenian Question’, and so on.

The Eastern Question, familiar to European statesmen and newspaper editors alike, he further breaks down into ‘The Eastern Question in the Past’, ‘The Eastern Question in the Nineteenth Century’, ‘The Eastern Question following the Berlin Conference’, ‘The Balkans and the Eastern Question’, ‘The Eastern Question and the Balkan Wars’, and then ‘Branches of the Eastern Question.’ These cover ‘The Inlets Question’; Macedonia; Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Serbia (as Novi Pazar), and ‘The Armenian Question’. ‘The Arab Question’ is dealt with at length in Chapter Two.

Daghira offers much detail as he moves through these various subsections, from the 1683 Battle of Kahlenberg, better known to English readers as the Battle of Vienna, Chesme (1770), and

⁵⁴⁸ Ar. *lughat al-Dād*.

⁵⁴⁹ Ar. *al-nāfiqūn bi-l-Dād*.

⁵⁵⁰ See also Wien, ‘Those Who Pronounce the *Dād*’, 2020.

⁵⁵¹ Issues or Cases are also possible.

⁵⁵² *Mas’ala al-Sharqia*.

others. Coupled with the wars, he also discusses the outcomes, and the terms of various treaties, including Karlowitz (1699), Passarowitz (1718), Kuchuk-Kainarji (1774), and Jassy, which agreement marked the end of the 1787-1792 Russo-Turkish War, and confirmed Russia's growing dominance in and around the Black Sea, further weakening the Ottomans. He further elucidates rising Russian influence in 'The Inlets Question' which, "can be summed up as the following: Should the Inlets⁵⁵³ be open solely for Russian battleships or to everyone?"

All of these can be seen as late seventeenth and eighteenth century precursors to the Berlin Conference of 1878, which Dagher calls, "a bad omen for Europe and the Balkans in particular", before adding, "If an investigative historian were to write the history of a current war that is raging, it would be possibly attributed to this ... conference."⁵⁵⁴ In almost forensic detail, Dagher's continues to offer a considered account of the complex events in and surrounding the recent Balkan Wars,⁵⁵⁵ and the Great Powers' false hope upon the signing the Treaty of Bucharest.⁵⁵⁶

A summary of Dagher's view of this period of history would be one of growing political and economic instability in the empire, which is how he aptly characterises the Eastern Question, calling it the main source of almost all conflicts since the sixteenth century. As such, he argues that the Ottomans are to blame for all the region's current ails. He also believes, however, that the present war will prove to be for the best, at least for the Arabs, since, "The European War for the East has been declared, and it will be terminated by offering the best definitive solution for the Eastern Question", that is Arab and Allied victory, but it will also "... cause the extinction of ancient nations and new ones will be established, while other nations may be

⁵⁵³ Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

⁵⁵⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 9.

⁵⁵⁵ 1912 and 1913.

⁵⁵⁶ August 1913.

humiliated or cherished”.⁵⁵⁷ All of which means a rebirth of Arab regional dominance. Clearly this author is writing for an audience he knows well.

Daghir’s historical narrative employs what might be termed ‘selective memory construction,’ a technique later identified by scholars of nationalism as essential to nation-building projects. By emphasising Arab civilisational achievements under the Abbasids while portraying Turkish rule as a period of decline, the text creates what Anderson identifies as the kind of selective historical memory essential to imagined community formation.⁵⁵⁸ This historical framing serves multiple propaganda functions: it provides intellectual justification for revolt, emotional motivation through appeals to lost glory, and practical legitimacy for Hussein’s claims to leadership as inheritor of Arab caliphal tradition.

In a section dealing with “Reasons for holding the conference”,⁵⁵⁹ Daghir includes extracts from speeches delivered by delegates at the first Arab Congress. The language is as florid and emotional as one might expect from what was essentially a party political conference. Alexander Bey Amoun,⁵⁶⁰ a delegate of the Decentralization Party, offers a suitably flowery explanation that is not far off comments made by other delegates when he spoke to the assembly to say, “After the recent incidents, the Ottoman nation has reached the brink of a cliff, as it is between a painful past and a dark future while looking at yesterday with unhappiness and sorrow and looking at tomorrow with fear and worry”.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 5.

⁵⁵⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (2006), 224.

⁵⁵⁹ First Arab Congress, Paris, 18-23 June, 1913.

⁵⁶⁰ Also Amoun.

⁵⁶¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 63.

A sense of the personal and painful nature of much of what Dagher is writing can be imagined every time he writes “the late”, as in “The late Abdul-Hamid al-Zahrawi⁵⁶² gave conference opening speech”, recalling the recent death of this or that individual, hanged in Beirut and Damascus just a month before the start of the Arab Revolt. Not only is this personal to Dagher, but also good propaganda in that this repeated motif is deliberately included to elicit an emotional response in readers.

Chapter Two, ‘The Arabian Question’⁵⁶³ (48; c.16,300), deals both with the more immediate causes of resentment on the part of the Arabs, and goes back further into the history of the Arabs than the past two centuries or so of Ottoman history in the previous chapter. Seeing this as one of the major causes of the “European war especially the Ottoman War”, Dagher argues that it was “because the ambitions of Germany towards the Arabian countries reached an extent that made England, France and Russia unable to remain quiet, and as the Unionists who conspired against Arab existence⁵⁶⁴ with the Germans, therefore, saw no other way except giving them support and seizing the opportunity to strike the Arab nation.”⁵⁶⁵

From this declarative opening, Dagher presents a definition of the Arabs, their historical range, and aspects of Arab history he thinks have been forgotten, as a result of centuries of Ottoman control. Taking in the Arabs pre-Islamic roots, complete with the all-important genealogies, and a discussion of current geographic reach and the populations of each, much of this section reads like a text book, which educational purpose is self-evident. It would also explain a possible ambition on the part of the Arab Bureau’s, to participate in the education of the Arabs, in the process making them more amenable to the revolt.

⁵⁶² Hanged in Damascus, 6 May.

⁵⁶³ Or the Question of the Arabs.

⁵⁶⁴ *Kayan al-Arab*.

⁵⁶⁵ *Al-oma al-Arabia; Thawrat al-Arab*, 30.

In terms of the still contentious McMahon-Hussein correspondence regarding the latter's territorial ambitions, Daghir is even more expansive than the Sherif, claiming, "The Arabian countries are bordered by the Taurus Mountains in the north, Iran, the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in the east, the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Red and Mediterranean Seas in the west, including Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula."⁵⁶⁶ In the Arabian Peninsula Daghir sees it as naturally divided into ten parts, the "Hejaz, Yemen, Asir, Najd, Hadramout, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the Levantine Desert."⁵⁶⁷ The last of these encompassed those areas that were a sticking point in the pre-revolt negotiations, and subsequent complaints about British betrayal and double-dealing.

His history of the Arabs starts at the very beginning with, "Arabs are a Semitic nation (according to Sam the son of Noah⁵⁶⁸)", and mention of "the sons of Ya'rib bin Qahtan⁵⁶⁹ who is said to be the first to speak the Arabic language and made the Land of Yemen as his residence", and moving on to the shared Abrahamic prophet Ibrahim, who, "sent his son Ismael along with his mother, Hajar, to Mecca to build the Holy House⁵⁷⁰ where he had many children."⁵⁷¹ Interestingly, much of this is extremely close to, and at times virtually verbatim, to the outline of the Arabs' origins Lawrence includes in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*⁵⁷² more than a decade later. While it is entirely plausible that Lawrence drew heavily on Daghir's work, they being Arab Bureau co-conspirators, the archival record fails to provide any evidence in support of this idea.

⁵⁶⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 31.

⁵⁶⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 31.

⁵⁶⁸ Quran: *Surah as-Saaffat*, 37:75-79; and *Surah al-Imran*, 3:33.

⁵⁶⁹ See van Donzel, "ya'rub arab", 483.

⁵⁷⁰ Or 'Sacred House', *Bayt al-Ḥarām*. Quran: *Surah al-Ma'idah*, 5:97.

⁵⁷¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 33.

⁵⁷² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), Chapter Two.

From the dawn of Islam, Dagher offers summary histories of the main eras of Islamic history, from the Rashidun and Umayyads, to the “Abbasid period – 132–656 AH – over a period of five and a half centuries. Conditions fluctuated according to political and social issues”, but which in its “first century, the Arab State had reached its peak of glory, sovereignty and wealth.”⁵⁷³ Credit to the respective glories of Persian civilisation and Fatimid Egypt is also paid.

By way of contrast, on the arrival of the Turks in the midst of the Abbasid’s Golden Age he writes they, “dominated the state affairs and tyrannized their laws ...” adding, “the Turks became more aggressive and they grew more autocratic and brutal, and the caliphs became a tool in their hands.”⁵⁷⁴ Mongol and Ottoman era history follows, marked by a continuing decline in Arab power and prestige, so “the Arabs can see with their own eyes their countries being divided and their regime weakening, but they stay silent despite their hatred towards the Turks and their need to avenge them.”⁵⁷⁵

Here too is an account of Arab-Ottoman relations until after the emergence of the Unionist (CUP) regime, and appearance of various Arab nationalist societies, the 1913 Congress, and the Unionists’ reaction against it. In essence, Dagher is claiming that the Arabs were loyal for centuries, but reached a breaking point after increased persecution, and now sought to reassert their independence because, “The Arabs lost their political independence and their flourishing civility with their union with the Turks”.⁵⁷⁶ Propagating the view that it is not just the Arabs

⁵⁷³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 35.

⁵⁷⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 36.

⁵⁷⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 39.

⁵⁷⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 41.

who are in revolt, Dagher says that, “one of many mistakes made by their party [was] the use of the policy of harshness and violence with other Ottoman peoples.”⁵⁷⁷

About a quarter of the way into the text, Dagher begins a discussion about ‘The Emergence of The Arab Parties’,⁵⁷⁸ referencing the origins and driving forces behind a number of these: the Decentralization Party,⁵⁷⁹ the Beirut Reform Association,⁵⁸⁰ the Literary Forum,⁵⁸¹ the Basra Reform Association,⁵⁸² “and other monarchical and military parties and associations established after the atrocities of the Unionists, especially the recent ones they committed in Syria and Iraq.”⁵⁸³ What is noteworthy here is there follows a direct admission that, “... they formed parties familiar to the readers and the associations that are known by only a few due to their low popularity and being confined to a specific group of Arab youth.”⁵⁸⁴ This is in clear contradiction to the exaggerated pre-war claims around membership relayed to the British in Cairo, which untruths Military Intelligence chose to believe without independent verification.

Chapter Three, ‘The Alleged Agreement between Arabs and Turks’ (22; 8,250), is a more detailed description of state-level Arab-Ottoman relations, including speeches and other outcomes of the first Arab Congress, including pro-Ottoman speeches, and the appointment of Arab delegates to go to Constantinople. There is too here a sense not so much of the calm before the storm but, rather, an opportunity for Arab representatives to put what they would see as reasonable requests before the authorities, in the spirit of inter-ethnic recognition and cooperation. Whereas, the view of any requests handed up from the Arabs was interpreted by

⁵⁷⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 45.

⁵⁷⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 51.

⁵⁷⁹ Based in Cairo, its leader was Rafik Bey al-Azem.

⁵⁸⁰ Made up of Syrian officials.

⁵⁸¹ Youth-led organisation headed by al-Sayed Talib Bey al-Naqib.

⁵⁸² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 52.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

the authorities as unreasonable demands. This though is surely an inherent risk in any relationship where the power dynamics are so imbalanced, here between an authoritarian power elite and one ethno-linguistic minority group among many in the domestic imperial setting. Thus, although the Ottomans made some seemingly positive noises regarding certain Arab demands, there are also grounds to argue that any such top down pronouncements left open the possibility that this largesse could be withheld at any time.

To bolster the view of Ottoman ambivalence, at best, or duplicity towards the Arabs, Daghir quotes at length from an official resolution issued by the Unionists, published in the Constantinople press, in August 1913, just weeks after the Congress. Among the announcements was, “Teaching should be in Arabic at all the state schools where most inhabitants speak this language in order to provide the required civil grounds needed immediately and in the future.” However, Daghir points out that this is followed almost immediately by details restricting Arabic language teaching to middle and preparatory schools, “and made a condition of preserving the teaching of the Turkish language for the mainstream”, concluding, “the ambiguity being intentional”⁵⁸⁵.

The CUP invitation to send a delegation of Arabs to Constantinople also comes in for close scrutiny, and detailed recounting of the apparently warm welcome received by the Arab’s representatives: Salim Effendi Sallam, Sheikh Ahmed Tabara, and the late Mukhtar Bey Beihem, the last two of whom were hanged in 1916. As Daghir says, the CUP’s subterfuge often reads like a thriller. For instance, when “the Unionist Government, which pretended to be loyal to the Arabs, was secretly conspiring and plotting against them, as it had summoned

⁵⁸⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 72.

some of its Syrian agents to Constantinople and instructed them to contradict the Arab liberals announcing that the Arab countries do not require reform.”⁵⁸⁶

There is a great deal more about the delegation in Constantinople, including a raft of information about various receptions and banquets to which the Arab delegation was invited, and extensive extracts from various after dinner speeches,⁵⁸⁷ complete with audience responses. Many of these speeches were delivered by men who would later be hanged. One such, already referenced, was Abdul Karim al-Khalil, who declared at the time that, “these meetings have helped in dispelling all complicated matters dividing the Arabs and Turks.”⁵⁸⁸

Another of the delegation, Sheikh Ahmad Tabbarah, opened his address in typically florid terms appropriate to the occasion: “I address your Highness⁵⁸⁹ by clear Arab tongue, the tongue of the Holy Quran and the great Arab prophet who said, “I love whoever loves the Arabs”.” Whether his comments were met with polite, staged responses, or genuine zeal, the official account makes a point of including the audience’s ostensible appreciation: “We have declared with full mouths and state now and in every place and time that we grew up under the shadow of the Ottoman Crescent (applause) and we want to live and die under its shadow (applause). And by “we” I mean Arabs, and here I mean every Arabic speaker, with no difference between a Muslim or a non-Muslim (applause).”

For Tabbarah and the others the idiom ‘flattery will get you nowhere’ could not have been truer, albeit their ultimate destination was the wrong end of the hangman’s noose. While they may

⁵⁸⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 79.

⁵⁸⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 75ff.

⁵⁸⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 86.

⁵⁸⁹ Crown Prince Şehzade Yusuf Izzeddin Efendi (1857-1916), eldest son of Sultan Abdulaziz (r.1861-1876). Staunchly anti-CUP, Izzeddin was said to have grown increasingly paranoid after years as heir, before committing suicide on 1 February in his villa at Zincirlikuyu, Istanbul. *Thawrat al-Arab*, 75.

have been comforted by Talaat Pashsa's response – "Also, I thank the notables who came from all the Arab countries to hold the Arab Congress in Paris, carrying out their sacred duty with all wisdom"⁵⁹⁰ – any such feelings were misguided and short-lived.

The chapter bears close reading for anyone wishing to understand the manoeuvres and machinations unfolding at this time, and the CUP's malfeasance when, instead of allowing delegates to leave the capital to return home, "they suddenly changed their plan and held on to some of the Arab leaders – as Talaat Bey said – but that was to execute them and not to shake their hands as brothers."⁵⁹¹

This chapter is also notable for a marked change in tone. At almost the halfway point of *Thawrat al-Arab* there comes about a dramatic increase in the narrative tension, with Dagher ratcheting up the tone, employing more pointed language, and launching a series of incendiary attacks against the whole Ottoman edifice, including an *ad hominin* denunciation of Djemal Pashsa, the Blood-shedder, or Bloodthirsty.⁵⁹² We know the overall purpose of this text, but here the author's goal is shown in his linguistic efforts to frame the Unionists' in the worst possible light, by highlighting their duplicity towards the Arabs; detailing the so-called al-Zahrawi Mission, and attempts to co-opt him with an appointment to the Senate; and the end game, rounding on, imprisoning, and executing numerous Arab representatives and others.

Chapter Four, 'The First Shocks' (14; 4,959), builds on the previous chapter, and the leitmotif on the theme of Ottoman treachery. Examples cited by Dagher include the ban on Arab Associations and the arrest and trial of Egyptian-Circassian Ottoman officer Aziz Bey Ali al-

⁵⁹⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 76.

⁵⁹¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 87.

⁵⁹² *Jamal Basha as-Saffah*.

Masri.⁵⁹³ This is an interesting case in that, instead of pursuing an immediate post-trial execution, Dagher reports, “the interest of Arab public opinion ... and after witnessing the increasing rage of the Arabs following the end of the trial, they decided to assassinate him in prison.”⁵⁹⁴ Even this alleged plan failed to materialise thanks, according to the author, to pressure applied by “the ambassadors of the Great Powers”, and most interestingly, again according to Dagher’s account, because “Great Britain had paid special attention to the matter of Aziz Bey” which led to al-Masri’s release once the Unionists “realised that his execution would lead to a great revolution in the Arab countries.”⁵⁹⁵

Had this trial and subsequent protests in defence of al-Masri come later than 1913 there is little doubt that the outcome would have been very different for “the hero of Cyrenaica”.⁵⁹⁶ As a post-factual note of interest, we might note that the Ottomans might have seen the charges of disloyalty levelled against al-Masri as being validated when he subsequently became one of the first ex-Ottoman army officers to join the Arab Revolt.

Dagher also finds space to include complaints about the poor condition of state education and the postal and telegraphic services in Arab countries. A speech delivered by Salim Effendi Salam,⁵⁹⁷ one of the Beirut deputies, bemoans the state of boys’ schools but, “As for girls schools, what do I say about them? What do you want me to say? Oh! deputies of the nation? They are in the lowest place. Women are the foundation of literary life and the cornerstone of

⁵⁹³ *The Egyptian*.

⁵⁹⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 90.

⁵⁹⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 90.

⁵⁹⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 88.

⁵⁹⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 94.

the social body. And if it is degraded, then the nation remains degenerate as well.”⁵⁹⁸ Overall, “the situation for boys and girls schools in the Arab countries is of great regret and wonder”.⁵⁹⁹

Speaking about the postal and telegraph service, the Damascus deputy Fares Effendi al-Khury⁶⁰⁰ complained in a speech he gave at the Chamber of Deputies about letters destined for Arab countries being opened and read, which clearly incenses the delegate: “Preserving the political and private secrets of the people is one of the most important and most sacred duties of post and telegraph service.”⁶⁰¹ As for telegraphs, they “are often received unclear, and the reason for this is that the officials are not familiar with the local language, so the official who does not know Arabic in the Levant, for example, changes the word to two words and vice versa, so the recipient cannot understand the meaning.”⁶⁰² The combination in this chapter of allegations of high treason and dissatisfaction with poor service give a certain curious feel to the chapter overall.

The thrust of the argument presented in Chapter Five, ‘The Arabs Loyalty to the Unionists’ (22; 8,249), can be summed up in one line from the chapter, “At no point in time have the acts and atrocities of the Unionists ever kept the Arab emirs from remaining loyal to them.”⁶⁰³ Designed to demonstrate the Arabs absolute loyalty to the Ottomans up to the start of the war, much of the chapter consists of speeches and letters from Arab nationalist figures demonstrating their ‘devotion’ to the empire. Most of them were subsequently hanged. Against the backdrop of the Arab Revolt, the claim of continuing Arab loyalty to the Ottoman empire might strike us as disingenuous. However, what the author is at pains to point out is the deterioration in relations

⁵⁹⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 95.

⁵⁹⁹ Speech delivered in the Chamber of Deputies, 14 July 1914. *Thawrat al-Arab*, 94-95.

⁶⁰⁰ Note to follow, *Thawrat al-Arab*, 96.

⁶⁰¹ Speech delivered 17 July 1914, *Thawrat al-Arab*, 96.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*

⁶⁰³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 99.

between Arabs from around the empire only latterly led to, and indeed directly caused, the Arab Revolt.

To this point, Dagher selects examples from a geographical range beyond Hussein's Mecca, or even events in Constantinople and Damascus. From the extreme south of the Arabian Peninsula Dagher writes, "I see it fitting to publish a reproduction of a political correspondence that al-Sayyid al-Idrīsī had sent to his Excellency the Imam Yaḥyá",⁶⁰⁴ because, as he puts it, al-Sayyid al-Idrīsī was "one of the Arab emirs who despises the Unionists the most, even he was inclined towards compromise with them and even desired it, all of this despite his hatred for them and his belief that their policies were bad."⁶⁰⁵ In all of this, it is important to remind ourselves that we are reading a work of propaganda and polemic, not a disinterested history of the emergence of Arab nationalist associations in the pre-war years.

There follows a seemingly complete reproduction of this letter which, running to more than 4,000 words, when read through, strikes one as possibly written with the intention of reaching a wider audience, to be read and shared among Imam Yaḥyá's tribe and perhaps wider circles or via publication. It was, in fact, published in 1913, in the fourth issue of *al-Manar*.

In the correspondence, al-Sayyid al-Idrīsī writes, "Just look at what has happened recently: We have undergone negotiations on this matter with the government three times – nay four times – after their messengers reached us. Whenever we replied in a way signalling agreement, they would turn their backs towards us in a show of haughtiness, arrogance, and contempt."⁶⁰⁶ With numerous Quranic references as well as quotations from non-religious sources, such as the

⁶⁰⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 100.

⁶⁰⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 100.

⁶⁰⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 100.

ninth century poet Abū Tammām,⁶⁰⁷ the letter is wide-ranging, here dealing with the history of Ottoman-Arab relations, now tackling the immediate threat facing various Arab leaders and their people: “And so this new generation of Turks has risen up, and they have mobilized soldiers accompanied by their naval destroyers and their piercing swords. There is talk and hearsay that both a sultanic proclamation and a directive from the Committee of Union and Progress have been issued to have us rooted out and exterminated. Little do they know that the matter is in God’s hands, the Most Generous Benefactor!”⁶⁰⁸

Letters from other Arab notables are also included, intended to demonstrate loyalty to the Ottomans in spite of their treachery: “These are the letters in full with nothing expunged from them except for the names of individuals still living as well as any matters unrelated to the realm of politics.”⁶⁰⁹ The letters are from “the deceased officer” Salīm Bey al-Jazā’irī, an Arab in the Ottoman army, writing⁶¹⁰ to one of a friend and political ally; “the deceased” Mukhtār Bayhum⁶¹¹ to a friend in Egypt⁶¹² five days before the Ottoman Empire entered the war; “the deceased” ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Khalīl.⁶¹³ “the deceased” Muḥammad al-Maḥmaṣānī, writing to friends “who had advised him to stay in Egypt after the announcement of mass military mobilisation”, he responded, “The homeland is in need of every one of its sons during these trying times, so it would be treasonous for us not to carry out our duty towards it.”⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁷ Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭā’ī (c.796/807-845), better known as Abū Tammām, a poet known for his ninth century compilation, the *Ḥamasah*, a 10-book collection of 884 poems, considered one of the greatest anthologies of Arabic literature ever assembled.

⁶⁰⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 107.

⁶⁰⁹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 109.

⁶¹⁰ Written 15 January, 1915.

⁶¹¹ Either a close relative of the Lebanese politician, writer & reformer Muhammad Jamil Bayham (1887-1978), author of numerous pro-Arab books and articles, or Dagher is wrong to call him as “the late”.

⁶¹² Written 26 October, 1914.

⁶¹³ Written 6 August, 1914.

⁶¹⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 111.

The last letter in this chapter⁶¹⁵ is part of what Daghir calls “an extensive secret correspondence from “the deceased” ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Zahrāwī to Rashīd Riḍā, of which he reproduces around 3,000 words. Rather than outlining some an anti-Ottoman plot, which one might imagine on seeing a letter headed with the words “Top Secret”,⁶¹⁶ al-Zahrāwī does nothing but lay out various political opinions, “and expressed his complete confidence in the Unionists as well as the necessity of remaining loyal to them. Accordingly, I saw it fitting to publish the letter exactly as it is so that the reader may comprehend the vast severity of the crime that the Unionists have committed by executing this well-intentioned, simple-hearted man, who had exposed himself to the criticism of his friends and the ire of his nation for his hope to achieve harmony between the Arabs and the Turks and to save the Ottoman Empire from its greatest internal crisis.”⁶¹⁷

As if laying out the case for the prosecution, his readers, Daghir concludes the chapter by showing the Arabs’ loyalty as apparently undimmed until after the start of the war, writing, “this great loyalty would only manifest itself most clearly after the Ottoman Empire entered the war. For at that time the Arabs put aside all of their disputes with the Turks and joined them in heart and soul to defend their shared homeland. Their soldiers plunged into battle in Iraq, the Caucasus, the Dardanelles, and the Suez Canal. Tens of thousands of them died in the battlefield.”⁶¹⁸ Ironically for Daghir, in spite of his best efforts to inform and develop greater anti-Ottoman opinions, the vast majority of Arabs fighting in the war would remain loyal to the Ottomans until the war’s end.

⁶¹⁵ Written 16 January, 1914.

⁶¹⁶ *Maktum kuluh ean kuli ‘ahad*: “Everything is hidden from everyone”, *Thawrat al-Arab*, 111.

⁶¹⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 111.

⁶¹⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 117.

As previously noted, Chapter Six, ‘The Unionists’ Tools to Erase Islam and Crush the Arabs’ (22; 6,916), sees an obvious uptick in anti-Ottoman language, a harsher tone, all the more rhetorically powerful coming in the wake of a chapter focussed on purported Arab loyalty. Now Dagher attacks the Ottomans directly, addressing numerous alleged offences against Islam, Muhammad, his Companions, “and all that is sacred in Islam.”⁶¹⁹

His initial target is the Association of *Türk Ocağı*, translatable as either Turkish Hearths or the Turkish Family. Dagher alleges it was set up to achieve, “the elimination of Islam and the Turkification of all Ottoman races.”⁶²⁰ While ‘Turkification’ efforts may have had the potential to show demonstrable results as the Ottomans imagined these, the “elimination of Islam” sounds as unlikely on the page as it would be in reality. As such, one wonders how effective Dagher imagined such outlandish propagandistic claims could be.

Established as an avowedly pro-Turkish organisation, its initial aims were to foster and promote Turkish language and culture, and in the context of the emergence of formal Arab nationalist groups, and the concurrent rise in tensions between these and Ottoman authorities, depending on one’s standpoint, *Türk Ocağı* could plausibly be deemed anti-Arab, if only by dint of being a pro-Turk organ of the Ottoman state. Dagher offers various *Türk Ocağı* anthems and chants, of which a single example will suffice to give a flavour of their type:

“Biz Türküz, sen Türklüğe emanetsin

Hiç korkma, hep ölür seni vermeyiz”.

⁶¹⁹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 121.

⁶²⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 119.

Or, “We are Turks, and you, O Asia, are in the trusteeship of the Turks. Fear no evil, for we would sacrifice our lives for you.” Not subtle, nor meant to be. Although they may well have been sung by Turks, “on the battlefield, all within earshot of Arab soldiers and officers”,⁶²¹ any presumed anti-Arab elements are surely more in the focus on Turks, rather than anti-Arab attacks. The same might be said of speeches Dagher cites, as heard in “state schools” and “the military academy in Constantinople” delivered by *Türk Ocağı* members, “all of whom were appointed and given generous salaries for the purpose of Turkifying the children of all races within the Ottoman Empire.”⁶²² After delivering a potted history glorifying the empire and Turks in general, an Arab officer launched into a possibly foolhardy response, saying, ““Sir, when you just taught me that this is a Turkish empire, and that this flag that I have vowed to defend is a Turkish flag – a flag that is foreign to me – you have completely exhausted my morale and extinguished my patriotic feelings....”

The officer replied:

“Just so you know, facts are one thing and feelings something else. Even if you are an Arab, you and your race are Turkish subjects.”⁶²³

Dagher next cites anonymous Arab officers in Bolayır, a town on the Gallipoli Peninsula, stumbling on a letter written, in 1912, by an unnamed Unionist leader to a high-ranking commander, ordering him to, “Expose the Arabs to enemy fire and try to get rid of them, for it would be beneficial to us if they were killed.”⁶²⁴ Genuine or otherwise, the letter was subsequently reprinted in numerous Arabic newspapers, and so in the pre-war era was clearly considered a newsworthy item, and a useful piece of propaganda for the Arab Bureau, Dagher and others.

⁶²¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 124.

⁶²² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 124.

⁶²³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 122.

⁶²⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 125.

Returning to the anti-Islam theme, Dagher highlights what he calls a *Türk Ocağı* policy of “spreading infidel and atheist books”,⁶²⁵ taking aim in particular at “a man of Afghani origin named Ubeydullah.” “He is not the delegate from Aydın also named Ubeydullah, but they are alike in their hatred of both the Arabs and Islam.” Among the “atheist books”, he references “*Kavm-ı Cedid*⁶²⁶ a digest of sermons ... *Tarihü’l-Müstakbel*⁶²⁷ by Celal Nuri Bey, and *Son Kitab*⁶²⁸ the famous periodical *Ictihad*⁶²⁹ and others.” He tarnishes the Unionists by quoting what he says are reliable statements outlining their, alleged, negative opinions of everything from the Two Holy Cities; the Rightly Guided Caliphs – “What is this ignorance and negligence that has taken hold of you? You hang up the names of Arab caliphs on your mosque walls ... yet you do not respectfully mention a single name of the Turkish caliphs”,⁶³⁰ al-Khidr,⁶³¹ The Angels, and the Saints in the Eyes; the Pillars of Islam, which he alleges “Turkish youth consisting of the Unionists, members of the *Türk Ocağı* Association, and tens of thousands of Turkish extremists” are supplanting with new pillars, viz. “First: Reason. Second: The testimony statement. Third: Upright morals. Fourth: Jihad and War through money and body. Fifth: Seeking to prepare the necessities of war through unity and harmony under the banner of the magnificent Ottoman Caliphate.”⁶³² Similar criticism is levelled at the Unionists stated opinions on mosques and holy places; the Translation of the Quran; on Muslims in general, and the ostensible issuance of a *fatwa* to kill the Arab people:⁶³³

⁶²⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 126.

⁶²⁶ *The New People; Thawrat al-Arab*, 126.

⁶²⁷ *The History of the Future; Thawrat al-Arab*, 126.

⁶²⁸ *The Last Book; Thawrat al-Arab*, 126.

⁶²⁹ *Struggle, Thawrat al-Arab*, 126.

⁶³⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 128.

⁶³¹ Figure in Islamic theology not in the Quran but considered a righteous ‘servant of God’, possessing great wisdom or mystical knowledge. In various traditions, Islamic and non-, al-Khidr is variously described as an angel, prophet, or wali (saint, ‘friend of God’), and guardian of the sea, who teaches secret knowledge and helps those in distress.

⁶³² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 130.

⁶³³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 132.

“Everyone, with the exception of the poor, the destitute, the crippled, and partially blind, so this includes everyone else such as the shaykhs who claim that they are the inheritors of the Prophet, teachers, issuers of Islamic legal rulings, judges, shaykhs of Sufi orders, dervishes, merchants, craftsmen, and in short everyone, has become, through the ruling of the Glorious Quran, apostates and among the hypocrites. Moreover, they must be killed, for they have intentionally forsaken the waging of jihad”.⁶³⁴

As if saving the best – or worst – for last, Dagher highlights a declaration by Ubaydullah that, “All Non-Unionists Are Infidels”:⁶³⁵ “Many Muslims, even religious scholars and shaykhs ... are apostates, for they had joined the Freedom and Accord Party and made agreements with the Patriarchate Likewise, there are those officers, soldiers, and turban-wearers who fled the battlefield. These people are not Muslims, but hypocrites and apostates”, whereas, “people who belonged to the Committee of Union and Progress during this war was no more than one hundred thousand. As for everyone else, they are apostates”.⁶³⁶

Given these execrating verbal assaults one might find it surprising that more Arabs did not turn against the Ottomans. Perhaps the fact that this portion of Dagher’s message comes a little over halfway through a 250 page work of propaganda, served to a largely non-literate society, was part of the problem.⁶³⁷

Chapter Seven, ‘The Situation Escalates, also Aggravated Sermons’ (28; 10,090), tackles immediate past and current concerns, especially Unionists’ anti-Arab sentiment, and the deeds of Cemal Pasha, the Blood Shedder, and further reference to the mass public hangings. This

⁶³⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 132.

⁶³⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 135.

⁶³⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 135.

⁶³⁷ Questions around how effective this messaging could be are addressed in Chapter 7.

chapter is especially noteworthy for the inclusion of entirely concocted stories, false anecdotes that are demonstrably and wholly untrue. Most remarkable is the entirely fabricated account of the destruction of the remains of the nineteenth century Algerian and Arab hero Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi.

The chapter's opening line quotes an unnamed member of the Turkish elite, "If we do not treat the Arabs as we would like, then they shall treat us as we deserve." There follow quotes and extracts that together form a litany of anti-Arab political messaging from the likes of Celâl Nuri Bey,⁶³⁸ "the famed Turkish writer" [who] wrote a book titled *Târîhü 'l-Müstakbel*⁶³⁹ in which he said: "It would be to the advantage of the government in Constantinople to force the Syrians to leave their homelands. The Arab lands, particularly Yemen and Iraq, must be transformed into Turkish colonies for the purpose of spreading the Turkish language, which must become the language of religion."⁶⁴⁰ This is followed with lines by Ahmet Şerif Bey,⁶⁴¹ from an undated issue of the newspaper *Tanîn*.⁶⁴² "The Arabs are still babbling on in their language, all while remaining completely ignorant of the Turkish language as if they were not under Turkish rule."⁶⁴³

The chapter also contains a lengthy condemnation of Cemal Paşa, detailing various crimes for which the author holds him responsible: "Cemal Paşa has long been renowned for the ingenuity of his murder and assassination methods and for his brazen spilling of innocent blood. He was the one who concocted the Armenian massacres in the Adana Governorate ... while he was

⁶³⁸ Celâl Nuri İleri (1881-1938), writer, politician, and important figure in Ottoman transition to republic.

⁶³⁹ *History of the Future; Thawrat al-Arab*, 136.

⁶⁴⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 136.

⁶⁴¹ Ahmet Şerif Bey, prominent journalist known, among other things, for his extensive travels in Anatolia, 1909-1914.

⁶⁴² *Resonance*. Turkish newspaper founded by Tevfik Fikret, Ottoman poet considered a founder of the modern school of Turkish poetry, after Young Turk Revolution. It became a strong supporter of the CUP. Title folded in 1947.

⁶⁴³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 136.

governor there.”⁶⁴⁴ Also levelled against him is his statement delivered to the military tribunal that tried and sentenced to death those nationalists hanged in 1916. The statement, signed by Cemal, published in the Syrian press on 5th Rajab, 1334; 5th May, 1916,⁶⁴⁵ and among other points Dagher contests is that, as he tells it, much of the evidence used to establish guilt consisted of, among other items, “political correspondences, some of which the Unionists had fabricated ... They did not publish reproductions of these letters in zincograph as they had done with other letters, for they were written in their own hands and looked more Turkish than Arabic.”⁶⁴⁶

Of those not sentenced to death, some were sentenced to varying jail sentences, while others were condemned to exile in Anatolia, their property being sequestered by the state, which order was signed, “Ahmed Cemal, Commander of the 4th Legion and Minister of the Navy.”⁶⁴⁷ Referring to this decree, listing the names of the innocent men found guilty, and cataloguing their sentences, in one of his few footnotes, Dagher says “This declaration was published in the esteemed *al-Muqattam* newspaper, quoted from the newspapers of Beirut.” There are only two footnotes that mention *al-Muqattam*, a modest number given that it employed Dagher, and published *Thawrat al-Arab*.

Accusations of forced confessions, personal animus, and simple spite are other reasons offered for Cemal Pasha’s deadly anti-Arab campaign. For Dagher, the war was simply a convenient moment for Cemal, and others, to pursue an anti-Arab, and anti-Armenian, agenda under the guise of a national emergency. It would hardly be the first time in history that the cover of war was employed to pursue purely political ends. Dagher sees a paranoid streak in their actions,

⁶⁴⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 137.

⁶⁴⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 139.

⁶⁴⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 139.

⁶⁴⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 142.

going as far as they did during wartime to fret about seemingly small things such as ordering warehouse or shop signs in Arabic to be replaced with Turkish language signs instead: “They got so obsessive about this that they would order doctors to change their entire signs to change just a single letter that was the difference between them being Turkish and Arabic. This was the letter *kāf* in the word *duktūr*, or doctor, and replacing it with the letter *qāf* to make the word *dūqtūr*.”⁶⁴⁸

As for the despoilation of ‘Abd al- Qādir’s grave, the paragraph is short enough that reading at speed one might easily miss it, although it is subsequently repeated: “As for the lamentable things they did, they destroyed the grave of the deceased ‘Abd al- Qādir al-Jazā’irī. They then extracted his remains and scattered them in the wind. This was because he was a famous Arab emir who had attained his fame by defending his homeland for fifteen years. His name had become respected and venerated even among those whom he had fought, as the reader of history knows.”⁶⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the archives have not yet shed light on whether this story was concocted by a member of the Arab Bureau, Daghir himself, or another, but it is a wonderful example of its type.

A summation of the different counter-blasts offered by the Arabs against Cemal’s charge of disloyalty and treason, the following item, published by Daghir’s own employer, *al-Muqattam*,⁶⁵⁰ says “that among the Arab officers and promoters of Arab ideology who have been hanged or persecuted there was no one who had ever thought of joining a foreign power or seceding from the Ottoman Empire. Cemal Paşa committed atrocities and heinous acts without the slightest perceptible stirrings of revolt in the Arab lands ever being felt. Cemal Paşa

⁶⁴⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 146.

⁶⁴⁹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 146.

⁶⁵⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 148.

is only doing what Timur, Genghis Khan, and Hulagu have done before him, and what the Unionists are doing today under the leadership of a gang of malicious blood-shedders. Their leader Talaat Paşa has stated for the whole world to hear that he has “slaughtered both criminal and innocent Armenians including women, the elderly, and children, out of fear that they might in the future become an infected limb on the body of the Ottoman Empire.”⁶⁵¹

As well as being possibly one of the first ever sources to reference crimes against the Armenians in print, Dagher highlights the sufferings of other groups, a lobbying effort for them to also join the revolt in whatever capacity they are able: “Regardless of their creed or sect, whether Muslim, Christian, Druze, Alawite, or Jew, the Arabs in Syria have been enduring oppression, hardship, scarcity, hunger, and poverty, the likes of which are unprecedented in all bygone ages. The calamities of ’60⁶⁵² were negligible compared to those of the present moment.”⁶⁵³ Dagher goes on to report details of prisoners last farewells, their transportation from prison to gallows, and accounts of the hangings themselves, reports he received second hand but which he offers assurances to his readers are true.

A note here will bring our attention to an important point for the whole of this book. We are probably more alert than ever to the possibility of being presented with stories that are not true. Whether one can always differentiate truth from fiction is another question, but we are at least alert to the possibility of being fed untruths. However, readers in 1916 would also have been alert to this possibility, which is of course true even for non-literate ‘readers’, who listened to a reading of the text, or had its contents passed on in some other way.

⁶⁵¹ Date given, 17 Shawwal, 1334 / 16 August, 1916; *Thawrat al-Arab*, 148.

⁶⁵² Reference to civil conflict in Mount Lebanon and Damascus, also called 1860 Syrian Civil War.

⁶⁵³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 148.

However an audience received it they would, each according to their abilities, have interrogated a text such as this, wondering if they were being presented with a factually accurate account, or was it perhaps ‘propaganda’, whether or not this term was used. Who is telling me this, and why? Does the listener already agree with the arguments being presented, or does the author need to persuade the reader that what he is saying is indeed true?

Here Dagher does what writers have done since time immemorial. In order to convince or otherwise reassure his audience of his trustworthiness he says he has it on good authority: “This is all according to what trustworthy sources have reported who had seen with their own eyes the atrocities and horrors that had befallen that unlucky country.”⁶⁵⁴ Would this be enough to convince the audience? It does perhaps offer a certain plain, unvarnished way of speaking, which is comforting because as much as people have a visceral dislike of being lied to there is an equivalent, innate openness to conviction when told something is true.

On the other hand, although Dagher’s audience might have understood, and even agreed with, his need to remain anonymous, there is something in this act of hiding that will make many readers uneasy at some atavistic level. Understanding this, Dagher also passes on messages from third parties, allowing other trusted sources to deliver the news. An interesting adjunct to the perfectly reasonable paranoia prevalent at this time, some of these trusted messengers are themselves anonymised, known only by a nom de plume, which would at least be familiar to readers. For instance, “The esteemed writer known as “The Traveller”⁶⁵⁵ reported to the newspaper *al-Muqattam* what an eyewitness told him who had arrived in Cairo in the middle

⁶⁵⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 149.

⁶⁵⁵ As yet unable to ‘unmask’ this journalist’s identity. *Thawrat al-Arab*, 150.

of the month of October in the year 1916”, adding later, “He also gave me an assortment of speeches that they had given before ascending the gallows.”⁶⁵⁶

When it comes to the hangings themselves, as one would expect, Dagher writes for maximum effect using every literary device at his disposal. As just discussed, his account of the hangings is based on eyewitness reports,⁶⁵⁷ with the text taking on a grim inevitability, deeply personal and replete with tragedy. The pathos is emphatic in the stories he tells, for instance of a son catching a glimpse of a parent, or final meetings between fathers or sisters and daughters, the prisoner in chains on his way to the gallows. A single example will suffice to illustrate the form: “They all proceeded to the gallows in a state of calm composure the likes of which are rarely seen. At the lead was Shafiq Bey al-Mu’ayyad,⁶⁵⁸ who was the oldest among them. He gave an eloquent and brief speech in which he elucidated the noble aims for which the Arabs had striven and the fundamental reforms that they had sought for the Ottoman lands. Next, he requested that his statement be concluded with a recital of the noble Fātiḥah.⁶⁵⁹ Shukrī Bey al-‘Asalī⁶⁶⁰ was heard to say on the gallows platform – and these were his last words – “Do not think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers do.”⁶⁶¹

It is almost certainly a hyperbolic claim, that all of the condemned were equally composed as they faced death, or that, “They all delivered speeches ... and statements made while they were in prison and during the military tribunal.”⁶⁶² It is also open to debate precisely how many were hanged, but while Dagher’s claim is on the high end it is not unbelievable: “No one knows the

⁶⁵⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 151.

⁶⁵⁷ See *Thawrat al-Arab*, Chapter 7: ‘Aggravated Sermons.’

⁶⁵⁸ See earlier note.

⁶⁵⁹ *The Opening*, first *surah* of the Quran, consisting of seven *ayah* (verses) which are a prayer for guidance and mercy, the first line of which is the ubiquitous *bi-smi-llāhi-r-raḥmāni-r-raḥīmi* (“In the name of God, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful”).

⁶⁶⁰ See earlier note.

⁶⁶¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 151.

⁶⁶² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 152.

number of the Arab nation's sons in Syria and Iraq who were hanged, but either way they number in the thousands. This is in addition to the Arab officers and soldiers who were executed in the army."⁶⁶³ Again, this was written for propaganda, and assertions about the heroic posture of condemned men delivers a message in keeping with authorial aims. This perhaps stands in contrast to any entirely candid account, which would no doubt have stripped much of the implied dignity from the hangings offered in *Thawrat al-Arab*, communicating instead what must have been a more confused, messy, and ultimately tragic spectacle.

From the hangings, Daghir turns to the famine and its impact on the population: "... let us speak candidly about it: Newspapers have estimated that 85,000 people have starved to death in Lebanon alone over the course of three months."⁶⁶⁴ The pages he devotes to this situation consist largely of newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts. The latter sources include "A distinguished American doctor who returned from Syria in the summer of 1916"⁶⁶⁵ and "An American woman has stated that tens of thousands of Syrians are starving to death every day, and there are not enough able bodies to bury the dead."⁶⁶⁶ Both of these eyewitnesses travelled more or less freely through Ottoman lands at this time, before America's entry to the war. Then American neutrality presumably also lent these witnesses a greater degree of credibility, even integrity, coupled with the USA's lack of formal colonial interests in the region, notwithstanding the historic presence of missionaries and educators, particularly in Lebanon.

With an eye to more literary source material, Daghir next quotes at length from a poem published in the Beirut newspaper *al-Balāgh*⁶⁶⁷ which he says was written as a panegyric to

⁶⁶³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 152.

⁶⁶⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 152.

⁶⁶⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 155.

⁶⁶⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 155.

⁶⁶⁷ *The Report, or The Message*, not to be confused with the Cairo-based newspaper of the same name: established June 1923.

Cemal Paşa, wishing him a blessed Ramadan. However, hidden in this verse the unnamed poet is actually writing about the ongoing famine, disguising criticism of Cemal Pasha and the regime's response behind the allegory of the Muslim month of ritual fasting. Either the government censor had a tin ear for poetry, or else was himself sympathetic to the plight of the starving masses:

“A path to you was chosen for me in the month of Fasting
When the starving were suffering
I had hoped, if understanding between us be true,
That After my account, you will not need to hear more about it.
You hear hearts beating nearby
And you know the miserable state we are in.
You see the healthy around you, but they are dead.”

...

“If you fast, then show mercy on people who have fasted all their lives
If you break fast, then remember the people with no dining tables.”⁶⁶⁸

The action in Chapter Eight, ‘The Volcano Erupts’ (17; 7,532), moves from the widespread suffering of the populations in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, to the particular festering discontent among advocates of Arab nationalism. Beyond feeling aggrieved, more than a year into the war, this is the moment where they are asking if it is possible to mount a militarily response. This portion of the book is the most immediate, dealing as it does with the start of the Arab Revolt, and Hussein’s declaration of Arab independence. It applauds the early, albeit limited, military successes enjoyed by revolting Arab forces, following this with the inclusion of a long speech by Hussein, which accounts for just under half of the whole chapter. Hussein

⁶⁶⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 156.

starts with his reasons for launching the Revolt, both justifying his decision and exhorting others to join the fight, lest those who remain allied to the Ottomans be seen as cowards and, by Hussein's reckoning, enemies of Islam and the Arabs, even if they themselves are Arabs.⁶⁶⁹ Being contemporaneous, the text of this speech is more energetic even than the previous two chapters, which were already livelier than earlier parts of *Thawrat al-Arab*.

As Dagher presents this episode, the recently self-styled King Hussein agreed to launch and lead the Revolt only after appeals and entreaties from emissaries from a number of Arab associations and other groups, most of whom had latterly escaped from the Ottoman clutches: "They realized that the presence of the Turkish armies in Syria and Iraq as well as the removal of the Arab armies from those two countries would prevent them from carrying out any noteworthy actions. ... and anyone who had survived the Unionist massacres would all rally behind a great leader from among their leaders who were far removed from Unionist and foreign control. ... Among the Arab emirs they found no person of greater soul nor sharper resolve than His Eminence, the Grand Sharif al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, Sharif of Mecca and its august Emir. They knew His Eminence was one who could sense the mood of the Arab nation."⁶⁷⁰ Dagher says these representatives approached Hussein because he was the only really suitable candidate to lead an anti-Ottoman revolt, given his noble heritage and his position as Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries.⁶⁷¹ If not exactly reluctantly, "His Eminence responded to their call for reasons both religious and nationalist."⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 165-169.

⁶⁷⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 157.

⁶⁷¹ *Khādīm al-haramayn aš-šarīfayn*, also sometimes 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' and 'Protector of the Two Holy Cities'.

⁶⁷² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 158.

Due to the Hejaz's relative remoteness from any sizeable Ottoman power base, it was seen as ideal location to raise an army, beyond "the centre of Turkish forces as well as close to the sea. Other reasons included the impassibility of its roads, the heat of its summers, the difficulty the enemy would encounter in reaching it, and the ease with which the railroads connecting the Hijāz to Syria could be disrupted. At the onset, the Arabs saw it was best to make do with the military forces in that country, to extract them from the hands of the Turks".⁶⁷³ Of great interest here is the idea, or outline of a plan, to disrupt the Hejaz railway being shared among tribal leaders before the start of the revolt, and well in advance of the involvement of British officers, such as Herbert Garland,⁶⁷⁴ and their highly effective demolition efforts.

After its initial successes, small-scale but welcome, Arab Revolt progress halted rather precipitously. Western accounts, such as that offered by Lawrence, tell one side of the story, but it is interesting to see how Dagher frames this, focussing his attention on the avowed desire to save the lives of their Ottoman foes: "It goes without saying that the Arabs had the strength to do more than they have done so far. However, His Excellency the Grand Sharif has refused to spill blood in the Hijaz, and had issued his stern orders to the commanders of his armies to tighten the encirclement of the Turkish soldiers, coercing them to surrender to avoid as much bloodshed as possible."⁶⁷⁵ A neat spin on the failure to seize Medina, worthy of any great propagandist.

There follows a reprint of Hussein's speech, approximately 2,000 words, in which he declares independence from the Ottoman empire,⁶⁷⁶ which constitutes about a third of the chapter. With

⁶⁷³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 161.

⁶⁷⁴ Herbert Garland, (1880-1921), metallurgist and Army Ordnance Corps officer, joined Arab Bureau and posted to the Hejaz in September 1916. An Arabic speaker, he developed, implemented, and trained both Arab Bureau officers and Arabs in the use of mines against rail lines, after 1917.

⁶⁷⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 164.

⁶⁷⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 165-169.

a regular scattering of Quranic verses and other appeals to his religiosity, Hussein is particularly damning of CUP rulings he sees as in direct contradiction of Islamic law. For instance, “they annulled the following statement of God – the most high – “For the male, what is equal to the share for two females”⁶⁷⁷ by dividing inheritance between the two sexes equally.”

A further example of their flouting Islamic law regards fasting during Ramadan: “To top it all off, they demolished one of the five pillars of Islam, this one being the Ramadan fast. They ordered soldiers stationed in the Holy Cities of Medina and Mecca, or Damascus for example, to break their fast during Ramadan. They ordered this so that the soldiers there would be on equal footing with soldiers fighting on the Russian border, thereby falsifying the clear Quranic proclamation: “Those of you who are sick or on a journey.”⁶⁷⁸

An accounting of various other alleged crimes and misdemeanours follows, including firing artillery in the vicinity of the Grand Mosque, Mecca, so that the “first shell landed around an arm and a half’s length from the Black Stone,⁶⁷⁹ while the second landed three arms’ lengths from it.” For all this, Hussein concludes, “we leave the final judgement in this disdain and affront to the Islamic world, but we shall not leave our religious and national identity to be a plaything in the hands of the Unionists”,⁶⁸⁰ before appealing directly to Muslims to join the cause: “We similarly ask from our Muslim brothers all around the globe East and West that they perform what they see as their duty towards us to strengthen the bonds of Islamic brotherhood.”⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 166. Quran: *Surat an-Nisa* (The Women) 4:11.

⁶⁷⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 166. Quran: *Surat al-Baqarah* (The Cow), 2:184.

⁶⁷⁹ *Kaaba*, the black stone building at the centre of Islam’s most important mosque, considered by Muslims to be the *Bayt Allah*, or ‘House of God’. Current structure built after the original building was damaged by fire during the Umayyad siege of Mecca, in 64 AH (683 CE), lending this detail in Hussein’s speech a resonance that would be understood by Muslims.

⁶⁸⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 168-169.

⁶⁸¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 169.

Chapter Nine, 'Europe and Arab Independence' (28; 9,759), focusses on responses to the Arab Revolt from the rest of the world, including messages from Europe loudly affirming support for Arab nationalism (perhaps speaking too soon!), and widespread ostensible approval and vows of support from across the Arab and wider Islamic world, with pro-Revolt statements, telegrams, and newspaper reports, and foreign delegations coming to Mecca. As Daghir says, "News of the Arab independence movement left a resounding impact all over the world. The religion of Islam swayed in ecstasy to the news. The Entente Powers met the news with great rejoicing, the neutral powers breathed a sigh of relief, and the Germans became incredibly nervous and uneasy."⁶⁸²

It is interesting to see this 'first draft of history' written as propaganda. The reader is treated to a stream of messages that offer nothing but fulsome support. Reading them, one would imagine that the declaration of the Revolt alone would prove sufficient to move the Ottomans to the brink of collapse, rather than staying in the fight until the dying days of the war, two years later. As well as being somewhat wide of the mark in its assertions regarding global Islamic support for the Arab Revolt, this chapter also makes for somewhat painful reading in its claims of the unstinting backing for an independent Arabia on the part of Britain and France, without anticipating the perceived betrayals that came to light once the fighting was over. If the author had any inkling of the inconsistent wartime agreements for post-war settlements he gives no hint.

⁶⁸² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 170.

Reading an official announcement from the London papers,⁶⁸³ reprinted in the Egyptian press in a translation provided by the Arab Bureau, it says, without apparent irony, “Great Britain has always viewed Arab aspirations with sympathy, but in the past her traditional friendship with Turkey compelled her to stand aloof.”⁶⁸⁴ On firmer ground are British statements that the “Holy Places should remain under independent Moslem rule and authority.”⁶⁸⁵ This was ever British policy, but as neither Mecca and Medina held any strategic for Britain this is not an exceptionally bold claim. An event that was used to great propaganda effect was the restoration of the *hajj* pilgrimage route from Cairo, prefigured in the earliest announcement in Britain and launched with great fanfare: “The present state of war has placed many difficulties and dangers in the way of those wishing to perform the pilgrimage; but the action taken by the Sharif of Mecca gives rise to the hope that arrangements may be made whereby the pilgrims may in future visit the Holy Shrines in peace and security.”⁶⁸⁶ Indeed, when this route was safely re-opened, and the *manal*, or ‘Holy Carpet’, was once again made in and processed out of Cairo en route to Mecca these events were indeed used to great propaganda effect, with help from the Arab Bureau that included placement of photographs in the *Illustrated London News*,⁶⁸⁷ with such lionising titles as ‘The Holy “Carpet” Taken to Mecca Under British Protection: A Great Mohammedan Pilgrimage Resumed’;⁶⁸⁸ ‘Egypt and Arabia: The Holy “Carpet” And The New Hedjaz Flag’;⁶⁸⁹ and ‘A Great Moslem Ceremony Under British Protection: The Holy “Carpet” Pilgrimage Leaving Cairo For Mecca’.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸³ 28 July, 1916; 28 Ramadan, 1334.

⁶⁸⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 170.

⁶⁸⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 171.

⁶⁸⁶ *Egyptian Gazette*, after 28 June, 1916; *Thawrat al-Arab*, 170.

⁶⁸⁷ Also Chapter 6.

⁶⁸⁸ *Illustrated London News*, Saturday, 30 September 1916, issue 4041, 378–379.

⁶⁸⁹ *Illustrated London News*, Saturday, 22 September 1917, issue 4092, 333.

⁶⁹⁰ *Illustrated London News*, Saturday, 6 October 1917, issue 4094, 396–397.

A voice from British Egypt's recent past, Lord Cromer,⁶⁹¹ also spoke on the subject of the Arab Revolt, in the House of Lords, which comments were written up in the Times.⁶⁹² "Although the whole of Arabia had been in a state of chronic revolt for many years past", as Cromer put it, "if anyone acquainted with the affairs of the East had been asked whether there was likely to be a revolt, he would have replied in the negative." It seems it was not only the Arab Bureau that was caught off guard by the start of the revolt. There followed a few words from the arch-inventor of one of the most famous instance of propaganda from the First World War, namely Viscount Bryce,⁶⁹³ head of the committee that produced the eponymous Bryce Report into alleged German atrocities in Belgium, and the first person to speak in the House of Lords, in July 1915, on the subject of the Armenian Genocide. Here too is another interesting reference to early, pre-Arab Bureau attacks against the railway, delivered by the Marquess of Crewe,⁶⁹⁴ Leader of the House of Lords: "The Government had no reason to suppose that the report of the cutting of a portion of the Hedjaz railway was untrue, but they had no further information on the subject."⁶⁹⁵

A lengthy article from *The Times* follows,⁶⁹⁶ giving British readers some context for the Arab Revolt, again translated into Arabic for publication in the Egyptian newspapers by the Arab Bureau. Among what the editor of *The Times* characterises as precursors to the Arab Revolt are the June 1915 uprising in Karbala, "in Arabian Iraq, a city revered by the Shia for containing the tomb of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet, and it appears that all the Turks have been

⁶⁹¹ Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer (1841-1917), British Controller-General in Egypt, 1878-1879, later Consul-General, 1883-1907.

⁶⁹² Speech made 18 June 1916, printed in *The Times* the following day.

⁶⁹³ James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce, (1838-1922), later British Ambassador to the USA.

⁶⁹⁴ Robert Offley Ashburton Crewe-Milnes, 1st Marquess of Crewe (1858-1945), Liberal politician, Leader of the House of Lords (1908-December 1916); Ambassador to France (1922-1928), and writer.

⁶⁹⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 172.

⁶⁹⁶ Although stated that this article was published on 20 August 1913, this author has not been able to locate the original, so this is a translation from the Arabic in *Thawrat al-Arab*.

expelled from there”,⁶⁹⁷ as well as noting the 1913 Arab uprising against, and expulsion of Turkish forces from, al-Ahsa,⁶⁹⁸ eastern Arabia.

This chapter is also important for the extensive coverage given to wishes of support from European and Muslim leaders, including words of encouragement from the French President, Monsieur Poincaré,⁶⁹⁹ from Russia, from Arab nationalists in exile in Switzerland, representatives of different Muslim communities, including the Agha Khan, the Muslim Youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina and, to the certain fury of British authorities in India, the following announcement from the Bombay office of *The Times*: “Indian Moslems are watching the action of the Grand Sharif of Mecca and the Arab tribes with intense interest. They hope that His Excellency the Grand Sharif shall be able to secure the pilgrimage road.”⁷⁰⁰ True, it is not perhaps as effusive in its praise as other voices, but cautiously supportive.

Visitors to Mecca included a representatives from the sultan of Morocco, the Bey of Tunisia, and the head of the French-Islamic delegation. Also there, to celebrate the Eid al-Adha,⁷⁰¹ 1334, was Rashid Rida, owner of *al-Manār* and, as previously discussed, a war-time British ally, which relationship would later sour, but not yet. A luminary among Islamic reformers, Rida’s speech delivered to Hussein and the assembled crowds would have made this a noteworthy gathering. Encomiastic with an ad hoc mix of anti-Ottoman slights and slanders, history, and Islamic theology, Rida closes praising Hussein, saying, “He has laid the strongest foundation for maintaining Islamic autonomy by establishing for it a new state. In this way he has given

⁶⁹⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 173.

⁶⁹⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 173.

⁶⁹⁹ Raymond Nicolas Landry Poincaré (1860-1934), French statesman and thrice Prime Minister (1912-1913, 1922-1924, and 1926-1929); and President of France, 1913-1920.

⁷⁰⁰ *The Times*, 26 June, 1916; 25 Sha’bān, 1334. *Thawrat al-Arab*, 181.

⁷⁰¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 187. Eid al-Adha, ‘Feast of the Sacrifice.’ The second major holiday in Islam, it honours, appropriately enough for a gathering around the Arab Revolt, sacrifice as an act of obedience to God’s command, here the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son.

the greatest gift to all Muslims. I do not say this in flattery or as a kind of poetic panegyric.”⁷⁰² Regardless of his assertion, this is precisely what Rida was delivering. Dagher says he is only including a summary⁷⁰³ of Rida’s words, but the 2,500 words he does reprint equate to something in the order of a 20-minute speech. What else, or how much, is lost to posterity we may never know.

The final three chapters are comparatively short. Chapter Ten, ‘The King Among the Arabs’ (5; 1,465), is further vindication of Hussein as the only possible choice of leader for an independent, post-war Arab kingdom. To accompany this narrative of Hussein as the man to lead Arabs in the fast-approaching post-Ottoman reality, Dagher reproduces in full a decree announcing, “The first Arab Ministry in the new era was formed on 7 Dhu al-Hijah, 1334; 5 October, 1916, and this is a copy of the Sunni decree authorized to form the afore-mentioned ministry”. Signed by Hussein as “Sharif⁷⁰⁴ of Mecca and its Prince, al-Hussein bin Ali”, it is addressed to Sheikh Abdullah Siraj,⁷⁰⁵ a prominent Islamic scholar favoured by Hussein who would hold various posts in the Kingdom of Hejaz, and in this decree appointed to the posts of Chief Justice and Deputy Prime Minister. As a respected Islamic authority, and electee in the Ottoman Parliament of 1908, although never serving, like Rida, Siraj lends additional credibility to Hussein’s claims to leadership of the Arab world.

Other appointees begin, shamelessly in the face of such blatant nepotism, with “Our son, Abdullah bin al-Hussein for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Undersecretary of the

⁷⁰² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 191.

⁷⁰³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 187.

⁷⁰⁴ Not “King” here.

⁷⁰⁵ Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd ar-Raḥman Sirāj (1876-1949), also Seraj, politician and Islamic scholar who held various posts in the Kingdom of Hejaz and, later, the Emirate of Transjordan. As well as appointing him Chief Justice and Deputy Prime Minister of the Hejaz government, Siraj also served as acting Prime Minister in lieu of Emir Ali until 1918.

Interior”.⁷⁰⁶ Chief of War and Undersecretary for the Commander of the Army is Abd al-Aziz bin Ali; Sheikh Ali Maliki as Minister of Education; Sheikh Yusuf Bin Salem as Minister of Public Affairs; Sheikh Muhammad Amin, former director of the Holy Haram, as Minister of Endowments; and Sheikh Ahmed bin Abdul Rahman Banaga as Minister of Finance. Lovers of purple prose would be pleased with the text appended to these proclamations: “The pledge of allegiance to His Majesty Hussein bin Ali created public satisfaction and pleasure in the Arab countries extending to all its borders. Arab delegations came to Mecca from every direction with a sense of sincerity and true loyalty, praying for His Majesty for glory and supporting his brave army for victory and triumph.”⁷⁰⁷

In the days before ubiquitous mass communication, the issuance of such decrees relied on circulation to lend them authority, and the role of the Arab Bureau in disseminating both *Thawrat al-Arab* and the placement of announcements in *al-Muqattam* and other pro-British newspapers should not be underestimated.

Between them, the final two chapters of *Thawrat al-Arab* are barely eleven pages, roughly 4,500 words, but in spite of their relatively size they are powerful, and provide the reader a positive and forward-looking end. They are at the same time poignant, recalling as they also do, the last wishes of two of Daghiri’s friends for an independent Arabia. Chapter Eleven, ‘The Arabs’ Future’ (5; 1,946), opens with a reflection about how, under the Turkish yoke, the Arabs had lost sight of their own inherent greatness, instead “the Arab people became a plaything in the hands of foreigners”.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁶ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 193.

⁷⁰⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 196.

⁷⁰⁸ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 197.

The author's language contrasts the Arabs' ignorance of their situation before the Arab Revolt with their rediscovered wisdom. In spite of the Ottomans efforts, "to curb and wipe out the Arabs' nationalism. At best, all they could do was cast a thick veil of ignorance over the Arabs' eyes, shrouding their eyes from the light of guidance and leaving them to stumble about in utter darkness for a period of time. Now that time has ended and the veil has been torn asunder, revealing behind it the Arab bride, more dazzling and beautiful than ever before. Indeed, today the Arab nation has come out upon the stage of life like a bride in her prime. Her zeal, enthusiasm, and readiness steady her footsteps and push her onwards."⁷⁰⁹

The imagery and allusion to ignorance before and sight after is reminiscent of the oft-employed Islamic rhetorical device of describing the Pre-Islamic era as a time of ignorance, *jāhiliyyah*. For Dagher, Hussein raising of the banner Arab independence reflects the tossing aside a veil of ignorance: "Now that time has ended and the veil has been torn asunder, revealing behind it the Arab bride, more dazzling and beautiful than ever before. Indeed, today the Arab nation has come out upon the stage of life like a bride in her prime. Her zeal, enthusiasm, and readiness steady her footsteps and push her onwards."⁷¹⁰

From the poetic to the practical, Dagher closes the chapter with reference to a number of articles from pre-war Arab associations, including the Decentralisation Party, Beirut and Iraq Reform Association, the Literary Club. Returning to the 1913 Arab Congress discussions, he is attempting to show not only the desire to establish an independent state, but the political know how, adding, "if the future of the nation can be said to rest on the genuine patriotism of its

⁷⁰⁹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 197.

⁷¹⁰ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 197.

individuals and the natural wealth of its lands, then the future of the Arabs will be glorious and bright.”⁷¹¹

In Chapter Twelve, ‘ ‘A Martyr’s Will and a Mujahid’s Greeting’ ’ (6; 2,435), Dagher concludes the narrative in a minor key. The ‘Martyr’s Will’ is a letter from the “martyr whose testament to the noble Arab nation we would like to record in the conclusion of this book is that of the deceased ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-‘Arīsī”,⁷¹² and the “the holy warrior, he is the Arab poet Fu’ād al-Khaṭīb who was among the first people to give his congratulations to Arab independence in the Hijaz with a rousing poem he had written with the ink of patriotism and loyalty.”⁷¹³ Amongst the final lines of this poem we read:

“O free Arabs! Verily, there is a dawn for you
That looks down smiling onto the universe.
A fragrance greets people with its puffs,
Wafting in from the east then bringing the dead back to life.
That life, which was once veiled
In the invisible world, now fears neither tedium nor illness.
It marched with the ages from the desert to the cities
Until finally settling down, becoming a widespread uprising.
...
March on to Syria, to the land of Iraq,
To the furthest reach of the Peninsula, and carry the flag.”⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 200.

⁷¹² *Thawrat al-Arab*, 201.

⁷¹³ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 204.

⁷¹⁴ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 206.

Having analysed the text, and certain background details, it is now apt to consider points of context not previously addressed. Pausing to recall that the Arab Revolt was only declared on 10 June, 1916, it is remarkable that *Thawrat al-Arab* was commissioned, written, edited, printed, published and distributed in just under six months.⁷¹⁵

A first reading show signs of its having been edited in haste, so that alongside a dozen or so identifiable spelling mistakes other, arguably minor, typographical errors crept into the text.⁷¹⁶ The endpapers include an – incomplete – list of nine errata, with a page and line number for each, which speaks to at least one post-printing proofing. The last line is a plea for clemency for authors and editors that echoes down the centuries, apologising for any other inadvertent mistakes that have been overlooked: “There are other printing mistakes which are obvious to the reader.”⁷¹⁷

There were, and the current author has made a note of these elsewhere.⁷¹⁸ As much as these *errata* might offer consolation that sloppy editors are not solely a contemporary problem, they also provide evidence of the haste with which the whole project was of necessity approached. The recent purges and other forms of anti-Arab violence to try and quash nationalist sympathies all factor in the backdrop to the creation of *Thawrat al-Arab*. Such infelicities in a work designed to influence public opinion, alongside the omission of certain subjects on the title page, and the absence of details of the contents of at least three chapters, may or may not be signs of slipshod editing. One wonders if given the general exigencies of wartime, a few minor professional slips were an acceptable price to pay against the urgent need to get the manuscript to press and in front of the reading public.

⁷¹⁵ Ask any publisher waiting for an academic to submit a manuscript.

⁷¹⁶ Specific examples addressed as they occur in the text.

⁷¹⁷ *Thawrat al-Arab*, 207.

⁷¹⁸ Publication of a full English translation of *Thawrat al-Arab* is forthcoming (Hurst: London, 2026).

Had *Thawrat al-Arab* not been commissioned at the behest of British Military Intelligence it is reasonable to suggest it would never have come into being. Regrettably, details of meetings to agree the extent of the commission, fees paid, or deadlines agreed, have so far eluded this writer. Also eluding this author to date are details of who on the Arab Bureau staff acted as the intermediary to the publisher, if not the author directly. It would be instructive to know who he was, to better understand his precise role and authority as the Arab Bureau's representative.

Regardless, its existence alone provides another instance of cooperation and collaboration between British Military Intelligence and local elites, including publishers and journalists, than was previously appreciated. As such, using this and other Arabic source materials⁷¹⁹ we are able to contribute to a reassessment of the effort and achievements of the Arab Bureau, more attuned to working with local actors, and through these making serious attempts to manipulate Arab public opinion in support of the British-backed Arab Revolt, which in itself was meant to reinforce British war aims in the Arab Middle East. One author who recognised *Thawrat al-Arab*'s importance said of it that, "Syrian activists got together, with British assistance," for "an exceptional propaganda effort."⁷²⁰ Tauber's brief note is the only English language source this author was able to locate in the literature mentioning *Thawrat al-Arab*.

Thawrat al-Arab operated across three distinct political contexts simultaneously. Among Ottoman subjects, it provided intellectual ammunition for anti-government sentiment, carefully coded to avoid immediate suppression while gradually undermining loyalty. In British-controlled Egypt, it served to align Arab nationalist discourse with British war aims, creating a

⁷¹⁹ And Chapter 6.

⁷²⁰ Tauber, *Arab Movements in World War I* (1993), 172.

symbiotic relationship between indigenous political movements and imperial strategy. Among potential allies, particularly tribal leaders considering whether to join Hussein's revolt, it offered both practical arguments – such as Ottoman weakness, and European support – and emotional appeals – for instance Arab honour, and religious duty – designed to tip the balance toward active participation. This multi-contextual approach demonstrates the Arab Bureau's understanding that effective propaganda must be tailored to specific political environments while maintaining overall strategic coherence.

While direct evidence of *Thawrat al-Arab*'s reception remains limited, analysis of its distribution strategy and contemporary responses reveals sophisticated understanding of how ideas circulate in segmented societies. The text's 500-copy print run was distributed to key urban centres – Basra, Jeddah, Mecca, Khartoum, and Tangier – suggesting targeting of what sociologist Lazarsfeld would later identify as “opinion leaders” who mediate between media messages and mass audiences.⁷²¹

The Arab Bureau's February 1917 report noting that the book “has been much appreciated in the Sudan, whence a demand for further copies has been received” provides rare contemporary evidence of positive reception.⁷²² This response pattern – appreciation in British-influenced territories while being banned in Ottoman areas – illustrates how the same text could operate differently across political boundaries. In Sudan, under British administration, *Thawrat al-Arab* could function as reinforcement for existing anti-Ottoman sentiment. In Ottoman territories, its circulation would necessarily be clandestine, potentially increasing its perceived authenticity as genuine Arab nationalist expression.

⁷²¹ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 49-68.

⁷²² FO 141/817, 11 February 1917.

The text's multilayered appeal would likely have generated varied interpretations among different audience segments. Religious scholars would have engaged primarily with its extensive Quranic citations and theological arguments against Ottoman religious authority. Tribal leaders might have focused on genealogical claims and promises of political autonomy. Urban intellectuals would have been drawn to its historical analysis and political argumentation. This interpretive flexibility – what literary theorist Wolfgang Iser called “implied reader” multiplicity⁷²³ – suggests sophisticated understanding of audience segmentation.

Comparison with contemporary Arabic nationalist publications reveals *Thawrat al-Arab's* distinctive features. Unlike the explicitly Christian Arab nationalism of Najib Azouri's *Le Réveil de la Nation Arabe* (1905) or the primarily Syrian focus of the Cairo-based *al-Ahram*, Dagher's text specifically emphasises Islamic legitimacy while claiming to represent all Arabs.⁷²⁴ This positioning suggests awareness that successful pan-Arab mobilisation required bridging religious and regional divisions that had fragmented earlier nationalist efforts.

The absence of recorded criticism or counter-arguments in contemporary Arabic sources may indicate either the text's limited circulation in areas where opposition might have been voiced, or the effectiveness of its claims to represent authentic Arab sentiment. The latter interpretation gains support from the fact that even critics of the Arab Revolt rarely attacked its historical or religious arguments directly, instead questioning its political feasibility or foreign backing.

⁷²³ Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1978), 34-38.

⁷²⁴ For comparison, see Haim, ed., *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (1962), 81-88.

Regarding production and distribution, one obvious point is the seeming slightness of the print run of 500 copies.⁷²⁵ By modern standards this might be judged a pitifully small number,⁷²⁶ however other factors should be borne in mind; most obvious is illiteracy in the Ottoman empire.⁷²⁷ One author described this, in the nineteenth century, as “pervasive throughout Arab society”, adding, “all assessments point to only a tiny, almost infinitesimal minority that was able to read. The percentage of literacy throughout the region was measurable in single-digit figures with only small variations between them, the situation being slightly better in Lebanon and Egypt and worst of all in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula.”⁷²⁸ By 1916, literacy remained extremely limited, less than eight percent in Egypt,⁷²⁹ and certainly not more than 10 percent across the de jure Ottoman empire as a whole.⁷³⁰ Against this background, the continuing power of oral transmission in a semi-literate society such as the Arab world at this time is worth bearing in mind. Among other things it meant that news, or at least portions of lengthier texts such *Thawrat al-Arab*, would be read out loud. As such both authors and publishers held a more than reasonable expectation of reaching far wider audiences than direct readership alone.

The text’s operational strategy reveals sophisticated understanding of how ideas circulate in semi-literate societies. With only 500 copies printed, *Thawrat al-Arab* was clearly designed not for mass distribution but for targeted influence among key opinion leaders—tribal sheikhs, religious figures, and urban intellectuals—who could then transmit its arguments through existing oral networks. This approach mirrors successful nationalist movements elsewhere, where print culture creates authoritative texts that then spread through traditional

⁷²⁵ FO 141/817.

⁷²⁶ Exceptions to 500 copies being considered ‘a pitifully small print run’ might include most DPhils.

⁷²⁷ See Chapter 5.

⁷²⁸ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995), 141.

⁷²⁹ Ayalon, 141.

⁷³⁰ See also Chapter 6; plus Fortna, (2018), 44-62; and Ayalon (1995), chapter 11.

communication channels. The book thus functioned as what we might call ‘cascade propaganda,’ designed to influence influencers rather than masses directly.

In more recent years, with far higher literacy rates in the Arabic-speaking world than existed in 1916, two modern Arabic language reissues of *Thawrat al-Arab* have been located by the current author, in 1987 and 2016.⁷³¹ Sales figures are not available for either edition, making it impossible to posit just how lively an interest in the subject there is among contemporary Arab readers, or whether it merely points to ease of access with print on demand and other technologies.

Considering the text as propaganda, we have taken note elsewhere of the wider debates in this field. Likewise, questions of how – and indeed if – one can assess with anything approaching a measurable degree of accuracy or utility, possible standards for evaluating the effectiveness of such works of propaganda, definitions of the same, etc. are addressed elsewhere.⁷³²

This chapter set out to discuss *Thawrat al-Arab*, arguing for its significance both as a text in its own right, and also in support of a wider reassessment of the Arab Bureau. On the former, we will satisfy ourselves with mention of just two points here.⁷³³ First, *Thawrat al-Arab* presents the first extended written argument in support of Arab nationalism since the start of the First World War. One might go further and argue that it is one of the very first available pro-Arab Nationalist works of comparable length. It is also unarguably the first substantial text and manifesto in support of general Arab nationalist claims, and Hussein’s claims to be the legitimate heir to a proposed, post-war Arab Kingdom to succeed the Ottoman empire, since

⁷³¹ For example Hindawi Foundation for Education and Culture (Beirut, 2016).

⁷³² See Chapter 6.

⁷³³ Chapter 6 for a full assessment of the significance of these Arabic materials.

the start of the Arab Revolt. Beyond the scope of this study, it is significant too for apparently being the earliest Arabic-language text to contain lengthy, contemporaneous discussion of the Armenian Genocide.

Second, *Thawrat al-Arab*'s appearance provides us with a remarkable document, one of the most singular achievements of British propaganda from the First World War, and without doubt the longest. The fact that *Thawrat al-Arab* project was conceived and supported by the Arab Bureau bolsters the view of that organisation as a highly professional intelligence unit, regardless of how unorthodox its membership and approaches when related to other comparable units, as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.⁷³⁴

Often disregarded as amateurs,⁷³⁵ *Thawrat al-Arab* alone stands to challenge this outdated criticism. Previous assessments of the Arab Bureau were inevitably limited by omitting any consideration of their Arabic outputs. This chapter has provided ample supporting evidence for this dissertation's central thesis that a reassessment of the Arab Bureau is overdue. The above study on its own allows one to state with confidence that the Arab Bureau was indeed a more innovative intelligence unit than has previously been acknowledged, especially in relation to its interactions with local, non-European allies and interlocutors, in pursuit of British war aims in the region.⁷³⁶

This chapter has further demonstrated that in spite of its previous status as an 'unknown' item of British propaganda, the rediscovery and translation of *Thawrat al-Arab* after decades of scholarly neglect allows us to see it for the important document it is. Not only was *Thawrat al-*

⁷³⁴ Chapter 3.

⁷³⁵ See Westrate et al.

⁷³⁶ As per PRO, CAB 27/1.

Arab the first book-length written argument in support of the British-backed Arab Revolt, but it was also “the longest single piece of British propaganda across the entire course of the First World War”,⁷³⁷ not just from the Middle Eastern arena but from any theatre. As such, *Thawrat al-Arab* must be seen as a strategic anti-Ottoman propaganda text whose significance lies in showing the Arab Bureau’s commitment to furthering British war efforts by spreading Arab nationalist sentiment, and that it attempted to do so to a much greater extent than has previously been argued. All of this leads us to argue that this can be seen as an original contribution to the existing scholarship.

⁷³⁷ Professor Christopher Andrew: author interview, Cambridge, 5 February, 2020.

CHAPTER 6 – ARABIC PROPAGANDA: MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS and COMBINED ASSESSMENT

This chapter analyses a diverse assortment of Arabic language materials produced, created, disseminated, or directly supported by the Arab Bureau. Materials include newspapers, reproductions of official proclamations from Sherif Hussein, speeches reprinted in Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*,⁷³⁸ as well as pamphlets, leaflets, stamps, and postcards, incorporating both text and visual elements. By examining these varied materials, we can complement the previous study of *Thawrat al-Arab* and also gain a more comprehensive understanding of the propaganda landscape in which the Arab Bureau operated, its impacts, and the role these played in attempting to shape Arab political consciousness over the course of the war. This substantial body of Arabic language propaganda material shows the Arab Bureau was engaged in a complex and multifaceted strategy of information dissemination, and there is sufficient evidence to justify a wholesale reassessment of this intelligence unit.

The anonymous five-page memorandum entitled “Report on ‘Moslem Propaganda’”⁷³⁹ that referred to *Thawrat al-Arab* also detailed other items of “Propaganda produced in Cairo”,⁷⁴⁰ the memo dividing these into, i) Newspapers; ii) Special Publications; and iii) Leaflets, examples from each category this study will now consider. All deserving more attention than they have previously received, some of these materials have been entirely overlooked to date, providing a rich, previously untapped vein for consideration. In all cases, these materials show both stand-alone, Arab Bureau efforts, and propaganda created in concert with either other departments of British Military Intelligence and or Arab allies.

⁷³⁸ See Chapter 5. Founded by Rida, *al-Manār (The Lighthouse; 1898-1935)* was an Egyptian-based magazine that espoused an Islamic political world view, most notably supporting a renewed, pan-Islamic Caliphate.

⁷³⁹ FO 141/817. “Report on ‘Moslem Propaganda’”, 11 February 1917.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

Examining a range of materials demonstrates how different materials served distinct purposes, and were meant for different audiences; reveals the complexity and adaptability of Arab Bureau information strategies; providing further evidence of their innovative approach to intelligence; and enables a fuller evaluation of individual impacts and their collective role in shaping Arab political thought and nationalist movements during this pivotal period.

In order to analyse these materials, this study employs a methodological approach that draws on several key frameworks. Primary among these is Lasswell's model of communication which remains pertinent, in spite of its age,⁷⁴¹ for analysis of propaganda in historical settings. Lasswell's framework - "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" - provides five essential elements for examining propaganda: the source, content, medium, target audience, and impact. This model is especially valuable in analysing the Arab Bureau's varied outputs across different media and audiences.

Several methodological challenges warrant brief acknowledgment. First, the analysis of historical propaganda materials, especially ephemeral items like leaflets and newspapers, presents obvious difficulties in terms of preservation and access. Second, given the limited contemporary documentation, assessing the immediate reception and impact of these materials remains challenging. Third, as Aldous Huxley noted, "The propagandist is a man who canalises an already existing stream. In a land where there is no water, he digs in vain."⁷⁴² This observation proves particularly relevant when considering the Arab Bureau's efforts to tap into

⁷⁴¹ Lasswell, 'Structure and Function of Communication in Society' (1948), 37-51.

⁷⁴² Huxley, 'Notes on Propaganda' (1936), cited in Vaughan, *Failure of Western Propaganda* (2005), 238.

existing Arab nationalist sentiments. These theoretical and practical considerations inform the analysis that follows without overshadowing the primary focus on the materials themselves.

Of the three Arabic language newspapers connected to the Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts - *al-Haqiqa*, *al-Qibla*, and *al-Kawkab* – each had distinct characteristics and purposes that reflected their sophisticated approach to reaching different audiences. The fact that each title had particular traits and provenance allows us to consider the question of Arabic propaganda in newspapers from several angles simultaneously.

*Al-Haqiqa*⁷⁴³ (*The Truth*) represents perhaps the most direct form of British-backed propaganda among the three. Produced by Wellington House, in London, but increasingly receiving input from the Arab Bureau after 1916, it was primarily distributed throughout the Middle East. Contemporary Foreign Office reports indicate that while the paper maintained a notionally independent editorial stance, it consistently promoted pro-British perspectives on the war. The archives also reveal careful attention to its circulation patterns.⁷⁴⁴ A particularly fascinating aspect of *al-Haqiqa*'s reach was its expansion, in coordination with the Arab Bureau, into other languages, as evidenced by *Cheng Pao*, its Chinese language edition.⁷⁴⁵ Such a multilingual approach demonstrates the Arab Bureau's innovative thinking about how to extend propaganda efforts beyond traditional linguistic and geographic boundaries.

The sophistication of *al-Qibla*'s editorial strategy merits closer examination, as it demonstrates the Arab Bureau's nuanced understanding of how to balance multiple propaganda objectives simultaneously. Published in Mecca and, according to the archival sources, on occasion in

⁷⁴³ Archival spelling is *al-Hakikat*, using British transliteration conventions from the time. This study follows IJMES, with *qaf* representing the English q.

⁷⁴⁴ CO 323/730. Memo on the circulation of *al-Hakikat*.

⁷⁴⁵ CO 323/731.

Jeddah, *al-Qibla*'s very name – *The Direction*, referring to the Muslim direction of prayer – reflected its positioning as a voice of religious and political authority. While receiving British support and oversight through the Arab Bureau's Jeddah office, the paper maintained a convincing appearance of independence that made it an effective vehicle for Arab nationalist messaging.

The paper's content strategy demonstrated remarkable sophistication in balancing multiple audiences and objectives. As Palmer noted in her contemporary analysis, *al-Qibla* simultaneously addressed "the free Bedouin of the desert, and the cultured university student of the town."⁷⁴⁶ This dual approach was evident in its mixture of content, where scholarly arguments in support of Arab nationalism appeared alongside traditional religious discussions, and local news, while modern telegraphic war updates shared space with classical Arabic literary extracts focused on moral and social virtues.

What made *al-Qibla* particularly effective was its weaving together religious legitimacy, Arab nationalist aspirations, and anti-Ottoman sentiment without appearing overtly propagandistic. It regularly published theological and general religious discussions, maintaining its credibility as a voice of Islamic orthodoxy, while simultaneously advancing political arguments against Turkish rule. Such a sophisticated balancing act is evident in how the paper handled the criticism of the Committee of Union and Progress. Rather than attacking them purely on political grounds, *al-Qibla* focused on their alleged religious transgressions, such as attempts to translate the Quran into Turkish or replace Arab caliphs' names in Constantinople mosques.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁶ Palmer, 'The Kibla: A Meccan Newspaper', *The Moslem World*, April 1917, 185.

⁷⁴⁷ Anon. editorial, 'The Arab Question', *The Moslem World*, April 1917, 169.

The Arab Bureau's understanding of cultural authenticity was particularly evident in *al-Qibla's* handling of the Arab Revolt. Rather than presenting it as a British-backed uprising, the paper consistently framed it as a purely internal Arab movement, aimed at protecting Islamic holy places from Turkish mismanagement. Contemporary reporting shows this approach was effective,⁷⁴⁸ with even sceptical Indian Muslim publications⁷⁴⁹ acknowledging the religious legitimacy of Sherif Hussein's claims, even while questioning their political implications.

The paper's treatment of international news also demonstrated sophisticated editorial judgment. While it carried regular updates on the progress of the war,⁷⁵⁰ these were carefully curated to support Arab nationalist objectives without appearing overtly pro-British. The selection and presentation of international press excerpts showed particular skill, with articles from European sources were chosen that supported Arab aspirations while maintaining sufficient critical distance to avoid accusations of Western influence.

One of the most innovative aspects of *al-Qibla's* approach was its use of historical and cultural arguments to advance contemporary political objectives. The paper regularly published articles on Arab contributions to Islamic civilisation⁷⁵¹ and world culture, effectively linking current Arab nationalist aspirations to a glorious past. This clever use of cultural memory helped create an intellectual framework for Arab independence that went beyond immediate political grievances against Ottoman rule.

⁷⁴⁸ FO 882/14, 16/9: Clayton to Symes (25 July 1916).

⁷⁴⁹ FO 882/14, 16/9: Ibid (25 July 1916).

⁷⁵⁰ FO 882/14, 16/8 (19 July 1916).

⁷⁵¹ First issue published 21 November, 1916.

The sophistication of this approach becomes particularly apparent when compared with more overtly propagandistic publications like *al-Haqiqah*. While the latter relied heavily on visual imagery⁷⁵² and simple messaging, *al-Qibla* engaged in complex intellectual discourse that helped shape Arab political thought. This difference reflects the Arab Bureau's understanding that different audiences required different approaches. While *al-Haqiqah* might impress rural populations with images of British power, *al-Qibla* needed to convince educated urban readers through reasoned argument and cultural appeals.

Al-Kawkab,⁷⁵³ produced in Cairo from November⁷⁵⁴ 1916, represented a sophisticated evolution in the Arab Bureau's propaganda strategy, and a middle ground between the more openly pro-British *al-Haqiqah* and the ostensibly independent *al-Qibla*. The paper aimed to convince Arab readers that Britain and its allies were fighting to defend Islam and promote Arab freedom. Contemporary Foreign Office documents suggest that *al-Kawkab* played a particularly important role in countering Ottoman propaganda among urban Arab populations.⁷⁵⁵ While *al-Haqiqah* maintained a relatively overt pro-British stance, *al-Kawkab* aimed for a more nuanced position that could effectively engage Arab readers while advancing British interests,⁷⁵⁶ occupying a strategic middle ground between the openly pro-British *al-Haqiqah* and the ostensibly independent *al-Qibla*, demonstrating the Arab Bureau's understanding that multiple voices with varying degrees of apparent autonomy would be more effective than a single propaganda channel.

⁷⁵² FO 141/475/8.

⁷⁵³ *The Star*. McEvoy, 'Influencing the Muslim world' (2021), 246.

⁷⁵⁴ First issue published 21 November 1916.

⁷⁵⁵ FO 141/738/6.

⁷⁵⁶ McEvoy, 'Influencing the Muslim world' (2021), 251.

The paper's editorial strategy was carefully crafted to convince Arab readers that Britain and its allies were fighting to defend Islam and promote Arab freedom. What makes *al-Kawkab* particularly significant is that it exemplifies the Arab Bureau's 'light touch' approach to propaganda. Contemporary Foreign Office documents suggest that the paper played a crucial role in countering Ottoman propaganda among urban Arab populations.⁷⁵⁷ Notably, while its association with *al-Haqqiqah* was known within British circles, Cairo officials thought it best to keep this connection secret, noting that *al-Haqqiqah* was "obviously produced by us."⁷⁵⁸

Al-Kawkab's policy was "specially pro-Arab and anti-Turk,"⁷⁵⁹ with particular emphasis on exposing Turkish oppression of Arabs in Syria, and Turkey's pan-Turanian ambitions. This editorial focus reflected the goal of trying to align British strategic interests with Arab nationalist sentiments. The paper was not merely a propaganda vehicle but served as a platform for articulating a vision of Arab political identity that could exist independently of Ottoman control while maintaining friendly relations with British interests.

What distinguished *al-Kawkab* from other propaganda efforts was its local production and management. Unlike *al-Haqqiqah*, which was produced in London, *al-Kawkab* was edited and printed by British officials in Cairo but largely written by Arabs for Arabs. This arrangement allowed for more culturally authentic content while maintaining strategic oversight. The absence of pictorial content, in contrast to *al-Haqqiqah*'s heavy reliance on images (more on which below), suggests a more sophisticated understanding of urban Arab audiences who were more likely to engage with textual political discourse.

⁷⁵⁷ FO 141/738/6.

⁷⁵⁸ BL IOR L/PS/11/110. Clayton to Hogarth, 30 September, 1916.

⁷⁵⁹ BL IOR L/PS/11/110: 'Report on Moslem Propaganda' (11 February 1917).

The paper's effectiveness was enhanced by its distribution through the Arab Bureau's network in Cairo, which had developed a relatively refined understanding of local political and cultural dynamics. Being produced locally allowed *al-Kawkab* to respond more quickly to regional developments and engage more directly with local political discourse, than say publications managed from London. This responsiveness made it particularly effective in countering Ottoman propaganda, as it could address specific claims and narratives in real-time rather than waiting for guidance from distant administrators.

The Arab Bureau's handling of *al-Kawkab* demonstrated remarkable acuity in balancing competing interests. While advancing pro-British perspectives, the paper needed to maintain credibility with Arab readers who would be sceptical of obvious propaganda, which required careful attention to tone, content, and presentation. The success of this approach is suggested by the paper's effectiveness in countering Ottoman influence, particularly among educated urban Arabs who might have been resistant to more obvious propaganda efforts.

The publication's role in the broader ecosystem of Arab Bureau propaganda reveals sophisticated understanding of how different media could serve complementary purposes. While *al-Haqqiqah* relied heavily on visual impact to reach less educated audiences, *al-Kawkab* engaged in more sophisticated political discourse aimed at urban intellectuals. This differentiation of approach demonstrates the Arab Bureau's nuanced understanding of their target audiences and the need for varied propaganda strategies.

The visual elements of the Arab Bureau's newspaper productions deserve more detailed examination, particularly in how they reflected sophisticated understanding of local aesthetic preferences. The design choices in *al-Qibla*, for instance, demonstrated careful balance

between traditional Islamic calligraphic styles and modern newspaper layouts. The masthead's use of classical *thuluth* script conveyed religious authority, while the overall layout adopted contemporary journalistic conventions familiar to urban Arab readers. Comparative analysis of the three main newspapers reveals distinct visual strategies for different audiences. While *al-Haqiqa* employed a more European-influenced design appropriate to its overtly pro-British stance, *al-Kawkab* adopted a hybrid approach that combined traditional Arab publishing aesthetics with modern elements. These design choices were not merely aesthetic but reflected an understanding of how visual elements could reinforce editorial positioning.

The erudition of *al-Haqiqah*'s production and distribution merits closer examination, as it reveals much about the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to propaganda. Initially produced by Wellington House, the newspaper received increasing input from the Arab Bureau after 1916, demonstrating the growing recognition of the need for more locally-informed content. The paper's physical qualities alone spoke to British imperial power, printed as it was in photogravure, an expensive and high-quality method, in two colours and broadsheet format,⁷⁶⁰ double the size of other illustrated papers, its very materiality was meant to convey strength and abundant resources.

The paper's visual strategy was carefully calibrated for what its creators understood of the target audience. As Edward Long, the paper's editor, explained, "the native of the countries with which we are concerned is generally unable to read, and often, he mistrusts both the person who is reading to him and that which is written. Pictures, however, awaken in his mind impressions which are not easily effaced."⁷⁶¹ This led to a heavy emphasis on images that

⁷⁶⁰ McEvoy, 'Influencing the Muslim world' (2021), 244.

⁷⁶¹ McEvoy, 241: IWM 49/3 (41), 90: 'Third Report on the Work Conducted for the Government at Wellington House' (September, 1916). ['Third Report'.]

demonstrated British military and industrial might, for example, photographs of artillery pieces, munitions factories, and battleships, “calculated to impress the Oriental and African mind.”⁷⁶² While this approach clearly reflected certain orientalist assumptions, its effectiveness is suggested by contemporary reports of the paper’s positive reception.⁷⁶³

Distribution patterns reveal both the scope of British ambitions and the sophistication of their propaganda networks. Of the 75,000 copies produced, most were sent to India, Afghanistan, Egypt and the Indian Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia, with smaller numbers reaching Muslim populations in Sudan, Nigeria, Persia, Abyssinia and China.⁷⁶⁴ The challenge of maintaining the paper’s credibility while achieving wide distribution led to innovative solutions. When concerns arose that free distribution was undermining the paper’s credibility, based on the belief that the ‘Oriental mind’ distrusted anything given away freely,⁷⁶⁵ the Arab Bureau adapted by developing commercial distribution channels through firms like Messrs. Wheeler and Co. in India.

Particularly revealing is how the Arab Bureau capitalised on unexpected opportunities. When it was discovered that copies of *al-Haqiqah* were being purchased in Afghanistan as wrapping paper,⁷⁶⁶ as it was cheaper than actual waste paper, initial concerns gave way to recognition of a valuable opportunity: the paper was still being read as it moved through commercial networks, reaching remote areas while carrying none of the suspicion that might attach to official distribution channels. As Lisle Wheeler, the paper’s distributor in India, enthusiastically

⁷⁶² FO 141/475/8, *al-Hakikat*.

⁷⁶³ FO 141/ 776, 787: Arab Bureau Report on Muslim Propaganda, 11 February, 1917.

⁷⁶⁴ FO 141/375, 2047: De Bunsen to Wingate, 12 June 1917.

⁷⁶⁵ FO 141/475, 2047: Clayton to War Office, 18 August 1916.

⁷⁶⁶ Westrate, 108.

noted, “short of dropping these papers into Afghanistan and Persia by means of aeroplanes, nothing better could be adopted.”⁷⁶⁷

The paper’s effectiveness can be measured in several ways. While the India Office was initially sceptical, reports from various colonial officials indicated its impact. A “well-known business man in Calcutta” praised it as “a great Imperial Educator,”⁷⁶⁸ while reports from Basra indicated it was “most favourably received” with “ready sale.”⁷⁶⁹ Even criticism of the paper’s Arabic translations, which was variously described as “very bad,” “archaic,” and “full of solecisms”,⁷⁷⁰ suggests its importance to British propaganda efforts, as colonial officials cared enough about its effectiveness to debate such details.

What makes *al-Haqqiqah* particularly significant for understanding the Arab Bureau’s efforts is that it demonstrates their adaptability and ability to refine their approach. The initial emphasis on demonstrating British power through images of military might was gradually complemented by more sophisticated content showing Muslim soldiers receiving medals, engaging in recreational activities, and participating in religious practices, all messages designed to demonstrate both British respect for Islam and the opportunities available through cooperation with British authorities. This evolution strongly suggests an organisation capable of learning from experience, and adjusting its methods accordingly.

Across all three newspapers, we can observe sophisticated attention to linguistic considerations, with careful use of both classical and colloquial Arabic as appropriate for different audiences. The papers employed regional dialectal variations to target specific

⁷⁶⁷ BL IOR L/PS/10/581/95: Wheeler to Rudge (8 January 1918).

⁷⁶⁸ BL IOR L/PS/10/581/64: Wheeler to Rudge (23 March 1918).

⁷⁶⁹ IWM 49/3(41), 90-91.

⁷⁷⁰ BL IOR L/PS/10/581/231: Home Department, Government of India to Seton, 24 January, 1917.

populations and integrated traditional literary and religious references to enhance their authenticity and appeal.⁷⁷¹ Their thematic content consistently promoted Arab independence narratives while critiquing Ottoman rule, though the intensity and directness of this messaging varied according to each paper's apparent degree of independence from British influence. The distribution strategies for these publications demonstrated equally careful consideration. Each paper targeted specific geographic and demographic audiences, utilising both British military channels and local Arab networks for circulation. While their circulation figures might appear modest by modern standards – archives indicate⁷⁷² *al-Qibla* claimed a circulation of 5,000 in 1919, though it was sold mostly abroad - these numbers were significant given contemporary literacy rates and the common practice of reading newspapers aloud in public spaces.

The varied approaches of these three newspapers demonstrate the degree to which the Arab Bureau understood local societal complexities, and how to reach and influence different segments of Arab society. Rather than relying on a single voice, they created a network of complementary publications, each with its own character and apparent level of independence from British influence. This multifaceted approach represents a significant innovation in intelligence and propaganda operations for its time, showing how the Arab Bureau adapted its methods to suit different audiences and objectives while maintaining overall strategic coherence.

Moving from newspapers to special publications, we encounter a diverse collection of propaganda materials that demonstrate an ability to craft targeted messages for specific purposes and audiences. The memorandum 'Report on 'Moslem Propaganda' categorises these

⁷⁷¹ FO 141/475, 2047/20, inclusion of various Arabic corrections.

⁷⁷² FO 141/375, F2047: De Bunsen to Wingate, 12 June, 1917.

special publications into several key items: the Sharif's Proclamations, the Moshi Pamphlet,⁷⁷³ and reprints of articles by Rashid Rida in *al-Manar*, with each publication revealing different aspects of the Arab Bureau's approach to propaganda.

The Sharif's Proclamations represent perhaps the most significant of these special publications, carrying as they did the weight of Hussein's religious and political authority. These required particularly delicate handling, needing as they did to present Hussein simultaneously as a religious leader and a nationalist figure, while free from any possible taint of too close an association with his British backers. The careful framing of these proclamations reflects a complex political balancing act, with the Arab Bureau helping to craft messages with appeal for both traditional religious sensibilities and modernist nationalist aspirations. The archives preserve several examples of these proclamations,⁷⁷⁴ with their distribution patterns suggesting careful targeting of different audiences across the Arab world.

The Moshi Pamphlet⁷⁷⁵ presents us with an especially fascinating case study in the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to propaganda, and it deserves particular attention as it demonstrates highly refined cross-cultural awareness. Known in the archives as "the Moshi document",⁷⁷⁶ this publication was designed for distribution among the Chinese Muslim population of German East Africa. The very existence of such a specifically targeted piece of propaganda demonstrates the complexity of Arab Bureau understanding of the war's global dimensions, and its willingness to reach beyond traditional geographic and cultural boundaries. The document represents a creative response to German activities in East Africa, with the Arab Bureau adapting its propaganda to engage with a unique audience far from its usual sphere of

⁷⁷³ CO 323/720/21. English translation of the Moshi document.

⁷⁷⁴ CO 323/761.

⁷⁷⁵ TNA CO 323/719/97: Library of Congress Control, 2003675286; POS–WWI–Gt Brit, no.257.

⁷⁷⁶ CO 323/719/97: Moshi document and the original German memo that prompted the Arab Bureau's response.

operations. While previous analyses have focused primarily on its target audience of Chinese Muslims in German East Africa,⁷⁷⁷ closer examination reveals several innovative aspects of its production and distribution that illuminate broader patterns in Arab Bureau's approaches.

The pamphlet's linguistic features merit detailed analysis. Rather than simply translating Arabic propaganda into Chinese, the document shows careful adaptation of Islamic concepts for a Chinese cultural context. The archives reveal discussions among Bureau personnel about appropriate terminology and cultural references, suggesting sophisticated understanding of the challenges in cross-cultural communication.⁷⁷⁸ Such attention to cultural nuance represents a significant departure from conventional colonial propaganda methods, which often relied on direct translations without cultural adaptation.

The distribution network for the Moshi Pamphlet provides another example of the Arab Bureau's innovative approach. Working through both British military channels and local Muslim merchants, the Arab Bureau created multiple pathways for the material to reach its intended audience. Contemporary reports⁷⁷⁹ indicate that the pamphlet's circulation extended beyond its original East African target area, reaching Chinese Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. This unexpected development demonstrates both the effectiveness of the Arab Bureau's distribution methods and their ability to adapt to emerging opportunities.

Particularly noteworthy among the special publications were the reprints of Sheikh Rashid Rida's articles from *al-Manar*. Rida represented a crucial voice in Arab intellectual discourse, and *al-Manar* was highly regarded by supporters, both literate and less well-educated, for its

⁷⁷⁷ CO 323/731, 302-306: memos on reception of Chinese materials.

⁷⁷⁸ CO 323/731, 295ff: re-Chinese language propaganda.

⁷⁷⁹ CO 323/719/97.

advocacy of Islamic political thought, particularly its support for a renewed, pan-Islamic Caliphate. The Arab Bureau's decision to reprint articles from *al-Manar*⁷⁸⁰ demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how to leverage existing intellectual authorities to support their propaganda aims. The selection and reproduction of specific articles suggests careful consideration of which pieces would best serve British interests while maintaining credibility with Arab audiences.

The Arab Bureau's approach to these special publications reveals a clear understanding of authority and influence in the Arab world. Rather than simply producing overtly pro-British materials, they often worked through existing channels of authority to convey their messages, from religious leaders like Hussein to intellectuals such as Rida. This indirect approach proved more effective than direct propaganda might have done, carrying as it did the authenticity of respected Arab voices while advancing British strategic interests. The Arab Bureau's willingness to adapt its message and methods for different audiences, from religious proclamations to intellectual discourse to targeted pamphlets for distant Muslim communities, demonstrates remarkable flexibility and innovation in propaganda operations.

What makes these special publications particularly significant for this study is how they demonstrate the Arab Bureau's ability to navigate complex cultural and political landscapes. The balance between religious and nationalist themes in Sharifian proclamations, the strategic use of intellectual discourse through Rida's articles, and the creative targeting of specific Muslim communities through documents like the Moshi Pamphlet, all suggest an organisation that understood the importance of nuanced, culturally-aware propaganda, an approach that stands in marked contrast to more conventional military intelligence operations of the period.

⁷⁸⁰ FO 141/817.

Among the most notable special publications, though somewhat challenging to categorise, are the Hejaz postage stamps. Issued in September 1916, these represent one of the Arab Bureau's most sophisticated and innovative propaganda efforts, and the project was conceived specifically as a direct propaganda response in the face of enemy denials that there was any Arab Revolt. As Storrs explained, "the best proof that it had taken place would be provided by an issue of Hejaz postage stamps, which would carry the Arab propaganda, self-paying and incontrovertible, to the four corners of the earth."⁷⁸¹ The project demonstrated great acuity and cultural sensitivity in its execution. As Storrs later wrote, he and Lawrence⁷⁸² sourced authentic Islamic design elements from Cairo's Arab Museum, "collecting suitable motifs in order that the design in wording, spirit and ornament, might be as far as possible representative and reminiscent of a purely Arab source of inspiration. Pictures and views were avoided, for these never formed part of Arab decoration, and are foreign to its art; so also was European lettering."⁷⁸³

The resulting designs incorporate motifs from prayer niches, mosque doors, and Quranic manuscripts, creating stamps that were authentically Arab in both spirit and execution. The arabesque designs were produced by two Cairo designers, Agami Effendi Ali and Mustafa Effendi Gozlan.⁷⁸⁴ Produced by the Survey of Egypt's printing department, Giza, two miles from Arab Bureau GHQ, the Savoy Hotel, the technical sophistication of the project was equally notable, with three-colour reproduction techniques and the high production quality itself conveying messaging about the resources and capabilities supporting the Arab cause.

⁷⁸¹ Storrs, *Orientalism* (1937), 220.

⁷⁸² See also Lawrence, *Seven Pillars* (1935), Chapter 16.

⁷⁸³ Storrs, *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁴ Webber, 'Life & Times of Colonel Stewart Francis Newcombe' (2015). Accessed 7 November 2024: <https://shadowofthecrescent.blogspot.com/2015/06/te-lawrence-and-hejaz-postage-stamps.html>

Distribution was carefully managed to enhance their propaganda value. While some were circulated through normal postal channels, special presentation sets were prepared for influential figures, including King George V. The project's effectiveness is suggested by contemporary German and Ottoman efforts to deny the stamps' legitimacy,⁷⁸⁵ as well as their rapid appreciation among collectors. By November 1918, dealers were already advertising to purchase used examples.⁷⁸⁶

This initiative exemplifies the Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach to propaganda, combining technical expertise, cultural authenticity, and strategic distribution to create materials that could simultaneously serve practical functions while advancing political objectives. The stamps' design and execution demonstrate how the Arab Bureau could work effectively through existing institutions, here the Survey of Egypt, while maintaining the cultural authenticity necessary for propaganda effectiveness.

Such an urbane approach to cultural authenticity in visual propaganda extended beyond stamps to other symbolic forms. Just as the Hejaz stamps required careful consideration of Islamic artistic traditions, the Arab Bureau also demonstrated great cultural awareness in their role in the development of another key national symbol, the flag of the Arab Revolt; a flag for Arab nationalism. While Mark Sykes is often credited with designing the flag,⁷⁸⁷ its colours drew upon deep historical and cultural resonance. The combination of black, white, green and red was associated with Arab identity centuries before British involvement, as evidenced in a verse by the fourteenth century Iraqi poet Safi al-Din al-Hilli.⁷⁸⁸ "White are our acts, black our

⁷⁸⁵ Beech, 'Hejaz: The First Postage Stamps [...] Additional Information' (2007), 38-40.

⁷⁸⁶ Beech, 'Hejaz: The First Postage Stamps' (2005), 323-327.

⁷⁸⁷ Teitelbaum, *Rise and Fall of the Hashemite Kingdom of Arabia* (2001), 205.

⁷⁸⁸ Safi al-Din al-Hilli (1278-1349), a warrior poet in the Arab tradition.

battles, green our fields, and red our swords.”⁷⁸⁹ Whether or not anyone in the Arab Bureau knew al-Hilli’s poem, their innovation lay in how these historically meaningful colours were adapted and co-opted for a modern political symbol, with the horizontal stripes representing Abbasid (black), Umayyad (white) and Rashidun (green) caliphates, while the red triangle represented the Hashemite dynasty.

The flag’s first official was in June 1917, though its origins and early history reflect the complex political dynamics of the period,⁷⁹⁰ its symbolic power was dramatically demonstrated in Damascus in September 1918, where its raising over the Grand Serail marked the city’s liberation⁷⁹¹ from Ottoman rule, an event significant enough to merit front-page coverage in *al-Muqtabas*, whose editorial declared, “Today is a big day for those who speak the Arabic language, and those who live in the city of Damascus. The Arab Flag with its four colours is now hoisted above everybody’s head. The impossible has now been achieved.”⁷⁹² The design proved remarkably successful: not only did it serve as a rallying symbol during the Arab Revolt, but it would influence the national flags of numerous modern Arab nation states. This longevity suggests how the Arab Bureau’s most effective propaganda efforts were those that drew on authentic Arab cultural traditions, rather than imposing external symbols. While such enduring symbols helped establish broader legitimacy for the Arab Revolt, the Arab Bureau also needed to address more immediate propaganda needs through ephemeral materials.

⁷⁸⁹ Al-Hilli, *Diwan* (1892).

⁷⁹⁰ Sykes and Hussein both have supporters to the claim that they came up with the original design, as does the nationalist organisation al-Fatat. On balance, it seems certain that Britain had a strong role in the process.

⁷⁹¹ Moubayed, ‘Two September Weeks That Saved Damascus’ (2015), 375-376.

⁷⁹² Emir Said related this was on 28 September, and Lawrence said the 30. However, *al-Muqtabas* ran this editorial, on 27 September, 1918, with the flag ceremony taking place the day before, i.e. 26 September, the same day the last Ottoman troops left Damascus, meaning that Said ruled the city for four days, rather than 24 hours, as most historians claim.

This third category of Arab Bureau propaganda materials, leaflets and other ephemeral publications, presents unique challenges for historical analysis while offering valuable insights into the Arab Bureau's most immediate and targeted propaganda efforts. Due to their inherently transitory nature, surviving examples are relatively rare, making those that have been preserved in the archives particularly valuable for our study.⁷⁹³ Two especially revealing examples have survived: a picture postcard featuring the Union Flag alongside Arabic text, and a second item of Chinese-language propaganda intended for the Muslim population of German East Africa.⁷⁹⁴

The Union Flag postcard⁷⁹⁵ represents a sophisticated attempt to combine visual and textual elements in propaganda. The design demonstrates careful consideration of how to present British power in a way that would appeal to Arab audiences without appearing overly domineering. The accompanying Arabic text was crafted to strike a delicate balance between asserting British military might and expressing support for Arab aspirations. This combination of visual symbolism and carefully worded text suggests the Arab Bureau's nuanced understanding of how to present British power in a way that would be palatable to Arab audiences.

While individual items like the Union Flag postcard reached wide audiences through informal channels, the Arab Bureau also carefully orchestrated the distribution of more substantial propaganda documents through official networks. Among the most notable of these were Hussein's official proclamations in pamphlet form. As evidence of the long-term value and impact of these otherwise ephemeral items, the Jordanian press produced reprints and

⁷⁹³ CO 323/732.

⁷⁹⁴ CO 323/720, 21: Moshi document and associated materials.

⁷⁹⁵ CO 323/732, 46.

newspaper opinion and editorial discussions about these documents to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the start of the Arab Revolt.⁷⁹⁶

These documents demonstrate sophisticated message calibration for different audiences over time. The first pamphlet,⁷⁹⁷ widely distributed across the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and French-controlled Muslim territories, focused on the Committee of Union and Progress's betrayal of Islamic principles and Arab interests. A second pamphlet, issued in September 1916,⁷⁹⁸ subtly refined this message to emphasise that Arab grievances were specifically with the CUP, rather than Turks in general. By the third pamphlet⁷⁹⁹ in November 1916, now signed by the "King of Arab Land" rather than merely "Sharif and Emir of Mecca," Hussein was explicitly addressing the nature of Arab-Allied cooperation, describing it as, "based on friendship and mutual benefits." This careful evolution of messaging shows the Arab Bureau's sophisticated understanding of how to gradually build acceptance for the Arab Revolt while maintaining its authentic voice and religious legitimacy.

The Arab Bureau's attention to such carefully calibrated official communications complemented their broader efforts with more ephemeral propaganda materials, as exemplified by another fascinating example of their leaflet propaganda described as a "Collection of Expressions of Moslem Loyalty."⁸⁰⁰ These assorted includes discussion of and content from *Cheng Pao*, a Chinese language edition of *al-Hakikat*. The very existence of such cross-cultural propaganda materials demonstrates a remarkably broad vision of how to reach and influence Muslim populations well beyond the Arab world, while working closely on the production with

⁷⁹⁶ Great Arab Revolt Centennial, Jordan, 2016. Accessed 7 November, 2024: <https://www.arabrevolt.jo/en/milestones-list/arab-revolt-pamphlets/>

⁷⁹⁷ CO 323/760/57: discussion around distribution of Sharifian proclamations.

⁷⁹⁸ CO 323/760/57 and CO 323/761: Sharif's proclamation for distribution.

⁷⁹⁹ CO 323/760/57 and CO 323/761: ditto.

⁸⁰⁰ CO 323/731.

both Wellington House and local, Cairo-based interlocuters. The fact that the Arab Bureau was willing to engage in such specialised propaganda efforts, targeting Chinese-speaking Muslims, in East Africa and elsewhere, reveals an innovative approach to intelligence work that went well beyond conventional military thinking of the period.

The archives also preserve an enthralling world map, from October 1916,⁸⁰¹ which presents a stark visual representation of British and Allied power. More than two-thirds of the globe is painted blue to represent Britain, its empire, and allies, while enemy territories appear in yellow. This map sparked debate even among contemporary British officials about its effectiveness as propaganda. Wellington House's T.C. Macnaghten commented rather dryly, "With regard to the Arabic copy, I can only say that the obvious suggestion to my mind is that if all these vast countries coloured in blue cannot polish off the tiny little lot coloured yellow, they cannot be a very efficient crowd."⁸⁰² Despite such reservations, the map was distributed across the Middle and Far East, though apparently with some reluctance on the part of colonial officials.⁸⁰³

The distribution methods for these leaflets and ephemeral materials reveal another noteworthy aspect of the Arab Bureau's approach to propaganda. Rather than relying solely on official British channels, the Arab Bureau appears to have utilised a variety of distribution networks, including local Arab allies, commercial channels, and religious networks. This multi-channel approach to distribution increased the likelihood of materials reaching their intended audiences while potentially obscuring their British origins.

⁸⁰¹ CO 323/732, 255: "Map of the World with letterpress in Arabic", 20 October, 1916.

⁸⁰² CO 323/732.

⁸⁰³ CO 323/732, 251-252: "I suppose we might as well agree to Wellington House sending these things out to the various Governors."

The challenges in analysing these ephemeral materials mirror some of the challenges the Arab Bureau itself faced in producing them. Questions of language, cultural sensitivity, and effective distribution would have required careful consideration. The surviving examples suggest that the Arab Bureau typically responded to these challenges with innovative solutions, whether through creative visual designs, multilingual adaptations, or sophisticated distribution strategies. The very nature of these leaflets – designed to be read and discarded rather than preserved – speaks to their role in immediate propaganda objectives rather than long-term influence operations. Yet, paradoxically, these seemingly temporary materials required careful thought about their immediate impact and the potential reactions they might provoke. The care and attention evident in their design and distribution further supports this study’s central thesis.

When examining the Arab Bureau’s diverse propaganda materials collectively, distinct patterns emerge that reveal a refined and multifaceted approach to information operations. The Arab Bureau appears to have understood that different types of materials – newspapers, special publications, and ephemeral leaflets – could serve complementary purposes in reaching and influencing various segments of Arab society. This understanding manifested not only in the content and style of different materials but also in their distribution methods and apparent levels of connection to British authorities.

The three newspapers – *al-Haqiqa*, *al-Qibla*, and *al-Kawkab* – demonstrate how the Arab Bureau calibrated its approach for different audiences and purposes. While *al-Haqiqa* maintained a relatively clear pro-British stance, *al-Qibla* operated with greater apparent independence, allowing it to reach audiences who might have been sceptical of more obviously British-backed publications. *Al-Kawkab* occupied a middle ground, suggesting the Arab Bureau’s recognition that a spectrum of approaches would be more effective than a single,

uniform voice. The special publications reveal another dimension of Arab Bureau strategy. The Sharif's Proclamations and reprints from Rida's *al-Manar* demonstrate the Arab Bureau's ability to work through existing authority figures and respected publications. This approach allowed British propaganda to benefit from the credibility of established Arab voices while maintaining a degree of distance from the message itself. The Moshi Pamphlet, meanwhile, shows how the Arab Bureau could adapt its methods for highly specific audiences when circumstances required.

Perhaps most revealing are the differences in linguistic approach across these materials. The newspapers typically employed a range of Arabic registers, from classical to colloquial, depending on their target audience and subject matter. Special publications, particularly those associated with religious authorities like the Sharif, tended to maintain a more consistently classical style, while the leaflets and other ephemera often used simpler, more direct language, appropriate to their immediate propaganda purposes. Such linguistic flexibility demonstrates a certain depth to the Arab Bureau's understanding of how language choice affects message reception.

Visual elements also received different treatment across the material types. While newspapers maintained relatively conservative layouts typical of the period, leaflets and postcards made bold use of imagery, such as the Union Flag and the world map showing Allied dominance. Such variation also suggests the Arab Bureau understood how different audiences would respond to various combinations of textual and visual elements.

Distribution strategies reveal another layer of sophistication. Newspapers relied primarily on established distribution networks, lending them an air of legitimacy. Special publications often

utilised religious and intellectual networks, while leaflets and ephemeral materials employed more diverse and sometimes covert distribution methods. This multi-channel approach allowed the Arab Bureau to reach different audiences through appropriate means while maintaining varying degrees of apparent British involvement.

When compared with earlier British intelligence approaches, or indeed contemporary German and Ottoman efforts, the Arab Bureau's varied yet coordinated strategy appears particularly innovative. Rather than simply producing and distributing propaganda materials, the Arab Bureau created an ecosystem of complementary publications that could work together while maintaining distinct identities and apparent levels of independence from British influence. This sophisticated approach demonstrates an understanding of propaganda that went beyond simple message dissemination to encompass complex questions of authority, credibility, and cultural resonance.

The effectiveness of this strategy is suggested by how the different materials reinforced each other without obviously appearing to do so. A reader of *al-Qibla* might encounter ideas that subtly complemented messages in the Sharif's Proclamations, while leaflets could provide more immediate and direct support for themes developed at greater length in newspaper articles. This layered approach to propaganda represents a significant innovation in intelligence operations, and shows Arab Bureau adaptation of traditional propaganda methods for what was a complex political and cultural landscape.

Referring back to Huxley's observation that "The propagandist is a man who canalises an already existing stream",⁸⁰⁴ this is a sentiment that proves particularly relevant when assessing

⁸⁰⁴ Huxley, 'Notes on Propaganda' (1936).

the Arab Bureau's propaganda strategy and its impact. The Arab Bureau demonstrated sophisticated understanding of this principle by identifying and working with existing currents of Arab political thought rather than attempting to create them wholesale.

The Arab Bureau's strategy reveals several levels of sophistication in its approach to propaganda. First, they recognised the need to operate through multiple channels simultaneously. The combination of newspapers, special publications, and ephemeral materials allowed them to reach different audiences through appropriate media while maintaining varying degrees of apparent British involvement. This multi-channel approach proved more sophisticated than conventional propaganda efforts which often relied on more direct and obvious methods.

A second aspect of their strategy involved careful calibration of their message for different audiences. Returning to the observation of Forester's fictional master forger noted in a previous chapter, "a Frenchman reading it would know it was not written by a Frenchman",⁸⁰⁵ aware of this challenge, the Arab Bureau employed Arab writers and editors to ensure authentic voice and idiom in their Arabic materials. This attention to authenticity manifested not only in language used but also in cultural and religious references, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of their target audiences.

When assessing impact, several factors merit consideration. The discussion around low literacy rates in the region during this period⁸⁰⁶ might initially suggest limited reach for written propaganda. However, the practice of reading newspapers aloud in public spaces extended the

⁸⁰⁵ Forester, *Hornblower During the Crisis* (1967), 109.

⁸⁰⁶ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East* (1995), 141.

reach of these materials beyond the literate population. Moreover, the Arab Bureau appears to have understood that influencing key opinion leaders could have broader societal impact even with limited direct readership. The circulation figures for these publications, while modest by modern standards, were significant in context. The archives reveal that in 1919, major Egyptian dailies like *al-Muqattam* and *al-Ahram* had circulations of 10-12,000 and 20,000 respectively.⁸⁰⁷ Against this backdrop, *al-Qibla*'s claimed circulation of 5,000, sold mostly abroad, represents meaningful reach. These numbers suggest that the Arab Bureau publications achieved significant penetration among the educated elite who were likely to influence broader public opinion.

The effectiveness of the Arab Bureau's strategy can also be measured by Ottoman responses to it. The need for counter-propaganda and the increasing severity of Ottoman measures against Arab nationalist activities suggest that British propaganda was having sufficient impact to warrant serious concern. The mass public executions of Arab nationalist figures in Lebanon and Syria, which occurred before the start of the Arab Revolt, while demonstrating Ottoman ability to maintain control through force, also inadvertently provided powerful evidence for propaganda narratives about Ottoman oppression.

Perhaps the most significant measure of the Arab Bureau's strategic sophistication lies in how their propaganda efforts created synergies between British wartime objectives and Arab nationalist aspirations. Rather than simply producing pro-British materials, they developed approaches that allowed both British and Arab interests to be advanced simultaneously, often through seemingly independent channels. This sophisticated balancing act represents a significant innovation in propaganda strategy.

⁸⁰⁷ F0 371/3721, 156659.

The Arab Bureau's understanding of the need for varied yet coordinated approaches, their attention to authenticity, and their ability to work through existing channels of influence all suggest an innovative approach to propaganda that went beyond conventional military intelligence practices of the period. Their strategy demonstrated understanding not just of how to create and distribute propaganda materials, but how to embed them within existing cultural and political discourse in ways that enhanced their credibility and impact.

The Arab Bureau's understanding of cultural sensitivities in propaganda dissemination deserves deeper analysis. As Westrate documented, materials that proved effective in European contexts often produced unexpected or counterproductive results when deployed in the Middle East.⁸⁰⁸ This observation opens up several important analytical avenues regarding the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to intelligence work. The case of pictorial propaganda provides a particularly revealing example. The Arab Bureau's initial assumptions about visual communication had to be rapidly revised based on audience response.⁸⁰⁹ While European propaganda relied heavily on visual shock value, the Arab Bureau discovered that images that horrified Western audiences might produce admiration rather than revulsion among Arab viewers. This led to sophisticated adaptation of visual materials for different cultural contexts, demonstrating the Arab Bureau's ability to learn from experience and modify its approaches accordingly.

One of the most innovative aspects of the Arab Bureau's work was its clever use of commercial distribution networks. Rather than relying solely on official channels, they developed complex

⁸⁰⁸ Westrate, 110.

⁸⁰⁹ Westrate, 109.

distribution mechanisms that utilised existing commercial infrastructure.⁸¹⁰ This reveals a sophisticated understanding of how to maintain credibility while maximising reach. The challenges faced in distributing *al-Haqiqa* illustrate broader patterns in the Arab Bureau's evolving approach to propaganda dissemination. The initial free distribution model proved counterproductive,⁸¹¹ revealing important insights about the relationship between perceived value and credibility in propaganda materials. The Arab Bureau's subsequent shift to commercial distribution channels, while maintaining careful oversight of content, demonstrates their ability to adapt methods based on local cultural and commercial realities.

The Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts operated within a complex ecosystem of competing and sometimes cooperating intelligence services. The relationship with the German Pan-Islamic Bureau in Berlin⁸¹² proved particularly significant, as both organisations sought to influence Arab public opinion through sophisticated propaganda campaigns. The Germans' approach, especially under von Oppenheim,⁸¹³ provided both a model to emulate and a challenge to counter. The Arab Bureau's response demonstrated remarkable adaptability, developing distinctive approaches that could effectively counter German influence while maintaining authenticity in Arab eyes.

The relationship with the India Office presented different challenges, particularly regarding messaging about the Arab Revolt.⁸¹⁴ While the Arab Bureau sought to promote the Arab Revolt as a legitimate expression of Arab aspirations, the India Office remained deeply concerned about its potential impact on Muslim opinion in the subcontinent. This tension required the

⁸¹⁰ IOR L/PS/10/581/521 (7 June 1916); and IOR L/PS/10/581/190: both Long to Shuckburgh (1 June 1917).

⁸¹¹ McEvoy, 249-250; and Westrate, 108.

⁸¹² Wingate to Clayton: DUA 136/5 (17 April 1916); in Westrate, 106.

⁸¹³ Max von Oppenheim (1860-1946), German lawyer, diplomat, archaeologist, and creator of anti-Allied propaganda targeting Muslim populations.

⁸¹⁴ See Chapter 3.

Arab Bureau to develop nuanced approaches that could advance British strategic interests while remaining sensitive to broader imperial concerns. The resulting propaganda materials often demonstrated sophisticated understanding of how to frame messages for multiple audiences simultaneously.

The Arab Bureau's interactions with French and Italian intelligence services reveal another dimension of their innovative approach. When these allies gained access to the *Arab Bulletin* the Arab Bureau adapted by developing new channels for sensitive information while maintaining the *Arab Bulletin* as a more general intelligence product.⁸¹⁵ Such a pragmatic response demonstrates an ability to maintain operational effectiveness even when ideal conditions of secrecy could not be maintained.

The Arab Bureau's role in wartime propaganda and intelligence operations represents a sophisticated departure from traditional colonial administrative methods, particularly in its engagement with Arab nationalist movements in Egypt. While incomplete archival records sometimes obscure the Arab Bureau's direct involvement in producing propaganda materials, this apparent limitation reveals a more nuanced understanding of their approach: rather than simply creating propaganda texts, the Arab Bureau fostered productive collaboration between British wartime administration and existing anti-Ottoman Arab nationalist activists in Egypt. In this telling, the Arab Bureau had a most significant role in enabling a convenient synergy of efforts between the wartime British administration and the already-existing, anti-Ottoman Arab nationalist activists in Egypt. Such an interpretation of the Arab Bureau's relationship as synergistic, acting both as producer and facilitator, provides compelling evidence of innovation.

⁸¹⁵ See Chapter 4.

Their propaganda efforts did not emerge in a vacuum but, rather, entered an already rich landscape of Arab intellectual discourse shaped by influential writers and publishers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The pre-existing community of Arab nationalist writers and activists, particularly Syrian and Lebanese émigrés, established in Cairo since the 1890s, provided fertile ground for such collaboration. Arab Bureau staff would have been aware of major Arabic periodicals like Jurji Zaydan's⁸¹⁶ *al-Hilal*⁸¹⁷ and Ya'qub Sarruf's⁸¹⁸ *al-Muqtataf*,⁸¹⁹ which had established a tradition of Arab intellectual discourse critical of Ottoman rule, and helped create an educated Arab readership accustomed to engaging with political and cultural ideas through print media. These publications pioneered a modern Arabic journalistic style that combined intellectual rigour with accessibility, an approach the Arab Bureau would later attempt to emulate in its own Arabic language productions.

The relationship between Dagher⁸²⁰ and Nimr⁸²¹ exemplifies how the Arab Bureau worked through these networks. Nimr's pro-British stance, seen in *al-Muqattam*, and his relationship with Cromer,⁸²² facilitated Dagher's more direct involvement with Arab Bureau propaganda efforts. This engagement with the émigré community became particularly significant following the execution of Arab nationalists in Damascus and Beirut in 1916, which galvanised anti-Ottoman sentiment among Syrian émigrés in Egypt.

⁸¹⁶ Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914), prolific Lebanese novelist, journalist, editor and teacher, and one of the first to formulate a theory of Arab nationalism.

⁸¹⁷ Established 1892, Zaydan used *al-Hilal* to publish serialisations of his twenty-plus historical novels.

⁸¹⁸ Yaqub Sarruf (1852-1927), pioneering Lebanese writer, publisher, and translator.

⁸¹⁹ Established 1876, a science-based monthly, co-founded in Beirut with Faris Nimr.

⁸²⁰ See Chapter 5.

⁸²¹ See Chapter 5.

⁸²² Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer (1841-1917), British statesman, diplomat and colonial administrator, controller-general (1878-1879), and agent and consul-general in Egypt (1883-1907) during the British occupation, after the Urabi uprising.

The Arab Bureau's approach demonstrates remarkable urbanity in several ways. Rather than creating propaganda in isolation, they tapped into existing intellectual currents and adapted pre-existing ideas for wartime purposes. Particularly relevant to the Arab Bureau's anti-Ottoman propaganda efforts was the intellectual foundation laid by al-Kawakibi⁸²³ in *Taba'i' al-istibdad*⁸²⁴ (*The Nature of Despotism*). Al-Kawakibi's systematic critique of Ottoman autocracy and his arguments for Arab political renewal provided ready-made themes that could be repurposed for wartime propaganda. While the Arab Bureau's archives do not explicitly reference al-Kawakibi, their propaganda materials often echo his core arguments about Ottoman misrule and the need for Arab political revival.⁸²⁵

Arab Bureau publications like *al-Haqqiqa* and *al-Kawkab* entered a marketplace where *al-Hilal* and *al-Muqtataf* had already established high standards for Arabic periodical publishing. The presence of these respected journals may help explain why, as noted in Arab Bureau correspondence,⁸²⁶ simply flooding the market with free propaganda materials proved counterproductive: their target audience was sophisticated enough to recognise and reject obvious propaganda when they saw it. This context likely influenced the Arab Bureau's decision to pursue more subtle approaches, including working through established Arab writers and publications rather than relying solely on their own direct productions.

As such, here Arab Bureau innovation lay in creating mechanisms for collaboration that served both British and Arab nationalist interests while maintaining appropriate distances and

⁸²³ 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (c.1854-c.1902), Syrian author, supporter of Pan-Arab solidarity, and one of the most prominent intellectuals of his time.

⁸²⁴ Published in 1902, it argues – among other things – that tyranny violated Islamic teachings; tyrants were responsible for Muslim nations' weaknesses; and the demise of the Muslims and the Arab world was due to oppressive Ottoman rule.

⁸²⁵ See *Thawrat al-Arab* in particular.

⁸²⁶ Westrate, 108.

deniability. This sophisticated understanding extended to recognising that anti-Ottoman sentiment did not automatically translate into pro-British feeling, and so the additional requirement for careful navigation of complex political loyalties.

When the Arab Bureau assisted in establishing *al-Qibla* as the Sharifian government's official organ, they were building on publishing traditions established by Zaydan, Sarruf and others. The decision to include theological discussions and religious matters in *al-Qibla*, while keeping British involvement carefully concealed, reflected an understanding of how Arab intellectual discourse had traditionally balanced religious and political concerns. This approach stood in marked contrast to more heavy-handed German propaganda efforts⁸²⁷ that often failed to resonate with Arab audiences.

The Arab Bureau's relationship with commercial distribution networks represents an understudied aspect of their operations that deserves closer examination. Beyond official channels, the Arab Bureau worked through existing commercial networks, particularly bookshops and newspaper vendors in major urban centres.⁸²⁸ This approach allowed their materials to reach audiences through familiar and trusted channels, while maintaining apparent independence from official British sources. The Cairo book trade, centred around al-Azhar, proved particularly important. Contemporary reports indicate that booksellers often bundled Arab Bureau-supported publications with other popular materials,⁸²⁹ creating natural distribution patterns that helped disguise their propaganda nature. This use of commercial networks demonstrates insight that effective propaganda requires not just compelling content but also credible distribution methods.

⁸²⁷ McEvoy, 'Influencing the Muslim World' (2021), 251.

⁸²⁸ McEvoy, *ibid*, 251-52.

⁸²⁹ McEvoy, 253.

This approach becomes particularly significant when compared with traditional colonial administrative methods. Previous British intelligence operations in the region, such as those conducted by the India Office, typically relied on more direct control and obvious channels of influence, maintaining their own Arabic press and propaganda operations clearly marked as official British productions.⁸³⁰ The Arab Bureau, by contrast, developed a nuanced approach, working through existing Arab institutions and networks, a strategy that both required a deeper understanding of local political dynamics and cultural sensitivities, and which went well beyond traditional propaganda production.

The Arab Bureau's handling of religious and political sensitivities further demonstrates their innovative methodology. Rather than attempting to control or direct Arab nationalist discourse, they created conditions where Arab nationalist goals could align with British strategic interests. This is evident in their handling of *al-Qibla*, where they provided support and oversight while allowing the publication to maintain its independent voice in support of Hussein's political ambitions. The Arab Bureau maintained various levels of involvement with different publications and groups, creating a spectrum of influence rather than a simple binary of controlled versus independent voices. Such a nuanced approach allowed them to maintain credibility across different audience segments while advancing British strategic goals.

The effectiveness of this strategy manifested in multiple dimensions. First, it allowed propaganda materials to maintain greater credibility by emerging from seemingly independent Arab sources. Second, it provided Arab nationalist movements with resources and platforms while allowing them to maintain their autonomy. Third, it created a framework for intelligence

⁸³⁰ Westrate, 106; and McEvoy, 253.

gathering that went beyond simple information collection to include deeper understanding of Arab political thought and aspirations. Fourth, it established a model for intelligence operations that emphasised collaboration and mutual benefit over direct control and manipulation.

The Arab Bureau's engagement with Cairo's intellectual community went beyond simple co-optation of existing publications. They showed great insight and understanding of the various motivations driving Arab nationalist activists. Many of these figures, particularly those from Syria and Lebanon, had complex relationships with both British authorities and Ottoman rule, but the Arab Bureau was aware and paid close attention to this, demonstrating an understanding of regional politics that went well beyond simple propaganda considerations.

The long-term implications of this approach proved significant and far-reaching. By working through existing Arab intellectual and political networks, rather than creating artificial ones, the Arab Bureau helped strengthen institutions that would continue to influence regional politics after the war. The networks of journalists, intellectuals, and political activists who collaborated with the Arab Bureau during the war would go on to play important roles in post-war developments throughout the Arab world.⁸³¹ This legacy suggests that while the Arab Bureau's immediate wartime propaganda efforts certainly contributed to British strategic goals, their more lasting impact may have been in demonstrating how intelligence operations could work through and with local political movements rather than simply attempting to control or direct them.

This assessment suggests that the Arab Bureau's true innovation lay not just in the content of its propaganda materials, but in its understanding of how to work through and with local

⁸³¹ Satia, 332-333; and Westrate, 204-208.

political and intellectual movements. Their understanding of the need to work through authentic local voices and institutions, rather than simply creating controlled outlets, anticipates later developments in how intelligence services would engage with local political movements and cultural institutions. In this light, the Arab Bureau's approach appears remarkably modern, prefiguring many aspects of contemporary intelligence operations. Their success in creating mechanisms for collaboration that served multiple purposes simultaneously required sophisticated understanding of local political dynamics and cultural sensitivities. This framework for intelligence gathering and influence went well beyond traditional colonial administrative methods, suggesting new possibilities for how military intelligence could operate in complex political environments.

The Arab Bureau's distinctive approach to propaganda operations also offers insights for understanding the evolution of intelligence work in complex cultural environments. Their recognition of the limitations of direct propaganda approaches led to the development of sophisticated indirect methods that worked through existing cultural and social networks. This understanding manifested in propaganda materials that maintained credibility by respecting local cultural forms while advancing British strategic objectives.

Their ingenious use of distribution networks demonstrated insight around maintaining plausible deniability while maximising reach, and by working through commercial channels and existing networks, they created delivery systems that could operate effectively while minimising obvious British involvement. This approach proved particularly effective in areas where direct British influence might have undermined message credibility.

Perhaps most significantly, the Arab Bureau developed methods that integrated intelligence gathering with propaganda dissemination in ways that enhanced both functions. Their propaganda networks provided valuable channels for collecting information about local attitudes and conditions, while intelligence gathering improved their ability to craft effective messages. This symbiotic relationship between intelligence and propaganda operations represents an important innovation in how intelligence services could operate in complex political and cultural environments.

The Arab Bureau's sophisticated understanding of cultural authenticity in propaganda operations proved particularly significant. Rather than simply translating British messages into Arabic, they developed approaches that worked within existing cultural frameworks to advance strategic objectives. This attention to cultural authenticity, combined with their distribution methods, created propaganda operations that went well beyond conventional military intelligence practices of the period.

These theoretical implications extend beyond their historical context, suggesting important principles for understanding how intelligence services can operate effectively in complex cultural environments. The Arab Bureau's recognition of the need to work through existing social and cultural networks, rather than imposing external structures, represents an enduring insight into effective intelligence operations.

This examination of the Arab Bureau's Arabic propaganda materials⁸³² reveals an organisation that was fundamentally innovative in its approach to intelligence operations. While previous chapters demonstrated the Arab Bureau's sophistication in individual endeavours, this broader

⁸³² Chapters 5 and 6.

analysis of their propaganda efforts shows how they developed new approaches to working within complex political and cultural environments.

The Arab Bureau's innovation manifested not merely in the variety of materials they produced – newspapers, special publications, a book, and leaflets and other ephemera – but also, and more significantly, in their understanding of how to work through existing networks of influence. Their engagement with Cairo's Arab intellectual community, particularly Syrian and Lebanese émigrés, demonstrated sophisticated understanding of how to align British strategic interests with local political aspirations without compromising the authenticity of either.

What makes the Arab Bureau's approach particularly significant is how it departed from conventional colonial administrative methods. Rather than simply creating and distributing propaganda, they developed mechanisms for collaboration that allowed both British and Arab interests to be advanced simultaneously. This synergistic approach required deeper cultural understanding and more subtle methods than traditional intelligence operations, representing a significant advancement in how military intelligence could operate in complex political environments.

This examination of the Arab Bureau's Arabic propaganda materials reveals an organisation fundamentally innovative in its approach to intelligence operations. The evidence suggests that this innovation was manifest not merely in the variety of materials produced but in the Arab Bureau's understanding of how to work through existing networks of influence. What makes their approach particularly significant is how it departed from conventional colonial administrative methods, developing mechanisms for collaboration that allowed intelligence services to engage with local political movements and cultural institutions. Working through

authentic local voices and institutions, rather than simply creating controlled outlets, they demonstrated an understanding of intelligence operations ahead of its time. This approach, emphasising facilitation and partnership over direct control, would influence future approaches, thus showing the Arab Bureau's legacy extending beyond their immediate wartime successes, demonstrating an understanding of intelligence operations that was ahead of its time.

CHAPTER 7 – IMPACT AND LEGACY

This chapter argues that while the Arab Bureau's immediate impact on wartime operations was significant, its longer-term legacy is more complex and nuanced than previously recognised. By examining this legacy through multiple theoretical frameworks, including the concept of the imperial epistemic community,⁸³³ we can better understand both the Arab Bureau's innovations and their lasting influence on intelligence practices and regional dynamics. In advance of developing this argument, it is useful to revisit earlier claims, restating arguments presented and developed earlier in this thesis.

The Arab Bureau's legacy operated through two distinct mechanisms that this chapter traces in turn. The first was direct institutional transmission: personnel who had worked within the Arab Bureau carried its methods and analytical culture with them to subsequent postings, replicating, consciously or otherwise, the approaches developed in Cairo. The second was independent rediscovery: later organisations, facing analogous problems of intelligence-gathering and propaganda production in culturally complex environments, arrived at solutions that mirrored Arab Bureau practice without direct institutional continuity. That both mechanisms are visible in the historical record, and that the second occurred even after the first had failed to preserve the Arab Bureau's methods through peacetime, is itself significant evidence of the organisation's innovative character.

The interwar period provides the clearest examples of the first mechanism. Percy Cox's tenures as Acting Minister in Persia (1918–1920) and High Commissioner in Iraq (1920–1923)⁸³⁴, as

⁸³³ See Chapter 2.

⁸³⁴ IOR/L/PS/10/387, Cox to India Office, 15 March 1921, on tribal confederation management.

discussed later in this chapter, drew explicitly on frameworks developed during his close association with the Arab Bureau. His correspondence with the Colonial Office⁸³⁵ reveals systematic application of Arab Bureau methods for analysing tribal relationships and managing local political dynamics, particularly in his detailed reports on Bedouin confederation structures, precisely the kind of analysis that the *Arab Bulletin* had pioneered.

The Second World War demonstrated the second mechanism with particular clarity. Adrian Bishop, explicitly referenced Arab Bureau propaganda techniques when developing materials for Arabic audiences in 1942, arguing in a memorandum to PWE London that the methods developed by his predecessors in the previous war remained directly relevant to the task at hand.⁸³⁶ The establishment of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) in 1947, under Bertram Thomas, represented a still more systematic revival: Thomas had worked alongside Arab Bureau personnel during the war and modelled MECAS's integration of intensive Arabic language training with cultural and political analysis directly on the Arab Bureau's foundational approach.⁸³⁷ That this revival came a quarter-century after the Arab Bureau's dissolution, and required conscious reconstruction rather than unbroken institutional memory, underlines both the organisation's lasting relevance and the failure, characteristic of wartime intelligence innovation more broadly, to preserve its methods in peacetime.

The Arab Bureau's unique composition and methods, from its interdisciplinary approach to intelligence gathering to its Arabic propaganda efforts, represented a significant departure from traditional military intelligence practices. As demonstrated through our analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* and works like *Thawrat al-Arab*, the Arab Bureau developed new paradigms for

⁸³⁵ CO 730/8, Cox to Churchill, 28 September 1921.

⁸³⁶ FO 898/64, Bishop to PWE London, 12 August 1942.

⁸³⁷ FO 924/1, Thomas to Bevin, 3 February 1947.

understanding and engaging with the Middle East that would influence British policy well beyond the war years.

The Arab Bureau's immediate impact on British intelligence operations was most clearly demonstrated through its flagship publication, the *Arab Bulletin*.⁸³⁸ The *Arab Bulletin*'s comprehensive approach to regional analysis represented a significant departure from conventional military intelligence reporting, combining military, political, and cultural insights to provide unprecedented depth of understanding.

The Arab Bureau's effectiveness in intelligence reporting was particularly evident in its ability to accurately predict and analyse regional developments. Their nuanced understanding of local dynamics enabled knowledgeable forecasting, including the eventual fall of Damascus, and shifts in tribal allegiances. This predictive capacity stemmed from the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to intelligence gathering, synthesising information from multiple sources including field agents, intercepted communications, and local informants. The resulting intelligence products demonstrated a sophistication in analysis on an entirely new scale.

The Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts, exemplified by *Thawrat al-Arab* and other work,⁸³⁹ demonstrated an unprecedented sophistication in engaging with local audiences, and which constituted a complex engagement with emerging Arab nationalist ideas, in the process revealing the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to information operations, while its distribution and reception across the Arab world demonstrated a culturally informed approach to propaganda.

⁸³⁸ See Chapter 4.

⁸³⁹ See Chapters 5 and 6.

What distinguished the Arab Bureau's propaganda efforts was their seamless integration with intelligence gathering operations. This synthesis created a feedback loop where intelligence informed propaganda creation, while propaganda distribution channels provided new sources of intelligence. The sophisticated use of cultural and religious themes in this propaganda demonstrated an understanding of local sensibilities that enhanced its effectiveness, so their Arabic materials influenced local opinion in ways cruder efforts would have failed.

The Arab Bureau's influence on regional policy during the war was weighty and multifaceted,⁸⁴⁰ their interdisciplinary approach and expertise shaping British understanding of and engagement with the Middle East. Their influence on military strategy was particularly evident in their guidance of the Arab Revolt, where their understanding of local dynamics informed both conventional and irregular warfare operations, and their recommendations shaped how British forces engaged with local allies and conducted operations.

The Arab Bureau's operational innovations represented a departure from traditional military intelligence practices, while the development of new intelligence gathering methods, combining academic expertise with military requirements, created unprecedented capabilities for understanding and influencing regional dynamics. These innovations, while sometimes viewed sceptically by traditional military authorities, proved remarkably effective in the unique conditions of the Middle Eastern theatre, and their success in implementing these approaches demonstrated the value of moving beyond conventional military intelligence practices to embrace more sophisticated, culturally informed methods.

⁸⁴⁰ See Chapter 3.

The Arab Bureau's integration of diverse sources of intelligence – from field reports and intercepted communications to local informants and academic analysis – created a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of regional dynamics than had previously been possible, and this approach to information management was evident in, among other areas, their handling of tribal intelligence. Rather than treating tribal politics as merely a military concern, the Arb Bureau developed complex frameworks for understanding tribal relationships, alliances, and motivations, as evidenced in numerous *Arab Bulletin* reports. Such an approach directly informed British strategy and political engagement throughout the region, while the Arab Bureau's ability to more accurately assess tribal movements and allegiances was crucial to the success of various operations, particularly during the Arab Revolt.

The Arab Bureau's role as a cultural interface between British authorities and local populations represented another significant immediate impact, their unique composition⁸⁴¹ creating an unprecedented capacity for cross-cultural understanding and communication, which proved especially valuable in navigating complex political and social environments. Such sophistication was perhaps most evident in its Arabic propaganda efforts, where *Thawrat al-Arab* demonstrates linguistic competence, deep understanding of local cultural and political sensibilities, and an ability to work through local voices. Their ability to produce propaganda that resonated with local audiences while advancing British interests represented a significant innovation in wartime information operations, and the success of this can be measured not just in their immediate reception but in their influence on Arab political discourse throughout the period.

⁸⁴¹ See Chapter 3.

The Arab Bureau's immediate impact on British policy formation was substantial, if not always obvious. Through the *Arab Bulletin's* regular reports and analyses, they shaped understanding of regional dynamics and influenced strategic decision-making at multiple levels, which in turn had a crucial role not just providing military intelligence, but supplying policy makers with political and cultural analysis that helped shape strategy.

This influence was perhaps most evident in British policy toward the Arab Revolt. As documented in both the *Arab Bulletin* and various propaganda materials, the Arab Bureau's understanding of local political dynamics and cultural sensitivities helped guide British support for Arab forces in ways that maximised military effectiveness while managing complex political relationships. This ability to balance immediate military objectives with longer-term political considerations also demonstrates an unusual degree of sophistication in strategic planning at that time.

In the realm of military operations, the Arab Bureau's immediate impact was evident in several innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and operational planning. The integration of academic expertise with military intelligence created new possibilities for operational effectiveness so that, for instance, the archaeological knowledge of certain members provided insights into terrain and historical trade routes that proved crucial for military planning.

Their influence on military operations extended beyond conventional intelligence gathering to include innovative approaches to irregular warfare, and Arab Bureau support for and coordination of guerrilla operations against Ottoman forces, such as attacks against the Hejaz Railway, show a strong grasp of the principles of asymmetric warfare ahead of their time. These

operations, guided by Arab Bureau intelligence and cultural expertise, were highly effective in disrupting Ottoman military capabilities while minimising British resource commitment.

Another significant impact of the Arab Bureau was its development of refined networks for intelligence gathering and information dissemination, creating and maintaining complex networks of informants, agents, and allies throughout the region. These networks, built on deep cultural understanding and personal relationships, provided invaluable intelligence while also serving as channels for propaganda distribution and political influence.

The effectiveness of these networks was enhanced by the Arab Bureau's innovative approach to information management, where instead of treating intelligence gathering as a purely military function, they developed systems for the integration of information from multiple sources and perspectives. This approach, evident in the *Arab Bulletin*, *Thawrat al-Arab* and other Arabic language works, allowed for more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of regional developments than traditional military intelligence could provide.

While the Arab Bureau's impact was obviously significant, it also faced important challenges and limitations, with new approaches often meeting resistance from military authorities, and its sophisticated cultural analyses not always translating directly into military or political success. The limitations of its influence were particularly evident in cases where broader strategic considerations or competing imperial interests overrode the Arab Bureau's recommendations. Nevertheless, these challenges should not obscure the significance of the Arab Bureau's impact on British operations in the Middle East during the First World War. Their innovative approaches to intelligence gathering, analysis, and propaganda set new standards for regional operations and demonstrated the value of combining cultural expertise

with military intelligence, and while not always appreciated at the time, they nonetheless represented important advances in military intelligence practices and regional engagement strategies.

The long-term legacy of the Arab Bureau extends beyond its wartime impact, though tracing this influence requires careful analysis of both institutional developments and broader intellectual trends in British intelligence practices. As demonstrated through our analysis of the *Arab Bulletin*,⁸⁴² the Arab Bureau's innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis anticipated many aspects of modern intelligence work, and while their integration of cultural expertise may have been viewed as unorthodox during wartime it established precedents that influenced subsequent developments in British intelligence operations.⁸⁴³

The Arab Bureau's emphasis on comprehensive regional analysis, combining political, economic, and cultural intelligence alongside military information, represented an approach that would gradually become standard practice in intelligence work. Their sophisticated approach to source integration, demonstrated throughout the *Arab Bulletin's* publication run, established new standards for intelligence analysis that would influence future generations so that, however controversial it was at the time, the Arab Bureau's recognition of the importance of cultural understanding was eventually recognised, appreciated, and adopted as crucial for effective operations in culturally distinct regions.

Perhaps the Arab Bureau's most significant long-term legacy lies in its influence on the development of regional expertise within British intelligence services. The Arab Bureau's

⁸⁴² Chapter 4.

⁸⁴³ For instance the Political Warfare Executive (PWE, 1941-1945), and the Information Research Department (IRD, 1948-1977), two units that were, like the Arab Bureau, under Foreign Office aegis.

demonstration of the value of deep cultural and linguistic knowledge, and successful integration of academic specialists into intelligence operations, helped establish the idea of area studies expertise in intelligence work, and proffering a model that would influence subsequent approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis in complex cultural environments.

This legacy is particularly evident in the evolution of British intelligence approaches to the Middle East in the post-war period, where the Arab Bureau's combination of cultural knowledge and intelligence work established patterns of engagement that would influence British operations for decades. Their sophisticated understanding of tribal politics and regional dynamics created frameworks for understanding the region that would influence subsequent generations of British officials and intelligence officers.

The Arab Bureau's influence on British regional understanding exemplifies what has been identified as the transformative impact of innovative intelligence practices on colonial knowledge systems,⁸⁴⁴ while their approach to regional analysis established what have been described as “enduring patterns of knowledge production”⁸⁴⁵ that continued to influence British engagement with the region long after their dissolution. This legacy demonstrates what Willmetts terms the “cultural intelligence paradigm shift,”⁸⁴⁶ where innovative wartime practices established new frameworks for understanding regional dynamics.

Their development of what Koschade identified as “integrated regional intelligence networks”⁸⁴⁷ also created lasting patterns for British engagement with Middle Eastern political

⁸⁴⁴ Bayley, *Empire and Information* (1996), 143.

⁸⁴⁵ Darnton, “‘What is the History of Books?’ Revisited’ (2007), 495.

⁸⁴⁶ Willmetts, ‘The cultural turn in intelligence studies’ (2019), 804.

⁸⁴⁷ Koschade, ‘A Social Network Analysis of Jemaah Islamiyah’ (2006), 559.

and social structures, and their success in establishing “effective epistemic communities”⁸⁴⁸ provided models for subsequent British intelligence operations in the region. This long-term impact reflects what has been termed “institutional knowledge evolution,”⁸⁴⁹ where innovative practices, even when not directly maintained, establish enduring patterns of regional engagement.

While these wartime operations shaped immediate post-war arrangements, their understanding of regional dynamics were sometimes at odds with broader imperial policies. The tension between the Arab Bureau’s nuanced appreciation of local political realities and the demands of imperial administration would influence British engagement with the region throughout the mandate period and beyond. If we turn briefly to Wellington House, by way of comparison, while it and the Arab Bureau were both products of the First World War, their legacies diverged significantly in the post-war period. Wellington House, despite its extensive wartime operations, left a relatively limited institutional legacy. Its propaganda techniques, however, laid the groundwork for future British information operations. By contrast, the Arab Bureau had a more enduring impact on British policy and presence in the region, meaning its legacy extended beyond institutional boundaries.

The Arab Bureau’s innovative approach to propaganda and political engagement established precedents for British information operations, while their sophisticated engagement with Arab nationalist discourse, while primarily aimed at wartime objectives, created patterns of political communication and engagement that would influence subsequent British approaches to

⁸⁴⁸ Haas, ‘Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’ (1992), 3.

⁸⁴⁹ Herman, *Intelligence Power* (1996), 143

regional politics. The legacy of these efforts can be traced through British political and intelligence operations in the Middle East throughout the twentieth century.

The transmission of Arab Bureau innovations through British intelligence institutions exemplifies what Hughes identified as the “institutional learning paradox”⁸⁵⁰ in intelligence organisations, a challenge reflected in what has been described elsewhere as the tension between innovation and institutional memory, where wartime advances often fail to become permanently integrated into organisational practices,⁸⁵¹ an experience that is further reflected in the “innovation retention challenge,”⁸⁵² where sophisticated operational practices developed under wartime pressure often face institutional resistance during peacetime. This is similar to what Andrew refers to as HASDD, or Historical Attention Span Deficit Disorder.⁸⁵³ This pattern of innovation and institutional resistance illustrates what has been identified elsewhere as the cyclical nature of intelligence innovation,⁸⁵⁴ where organisations often rediscover and reinvent practices previously developed but incompletely retained. The Arab Bureau’s experience with “cultural intelligence integration”⁸⁵⁵ provides a particularly relevant case study of this phenomenon. Their sophisticated approaches to what has been called “regional intelligence engagement”⁸⁵⁶ established valuable precedents that, while not always maintained, continue to offer relevant insights for modern intelligence operations.

The Arab Bureau’s unique composition and methods created challenges for institutional knowledge retention, so that the very qualities that made them so innovative in wartime – the

⁸⁵⁰ Hughes et al, *Exploring Intelligence Archives* (2008), 45.

⁸⁵¹ Aldrich, ‘Strategic culture as a constraint’ (2017), 628.

⁸⁵² Ferris, *British Army and Signals Intelligence* (1992), 55.

⁸⁵³ Andrew, ‘Intelligence Analysis Needs to Look Backwards Before Looking Forward’ (2004).

⁸⁵⁴ Beach, *Haig’s Intelligence* (2015), 167.

⁸⁵⁵ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007), 234.

⁸⁵⁶ Wagner, ‘Intelligence and the Origins of the British Middle East’ (2015), 725.

interdisciplinary approach, reliance on academic expertise, and flexible organisational structure – made it difficult to fully integrate these methods into more traditional military and intelligence structures in the post-war period. The detailed understanding of regional dynamics demonstrated in the *Arab Bulletin* often proved difficult to replicate within more conventional intelligence structures. This difficulty was massively compounded by the closure of the Arab Bureau, and the resultant loss of expertise and personal networks. While their approach to cultural intelligence was largely overlooked in the immediate post-war period, certain operational methods persisted. For instance, their technique of integrating academic expertise with intelligence gathering influenced the development of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) in Lebanon.⁸⁵⁷

The Arab Bureau's methods for handling tribal intelligence proved particularly enduring. Their sophisticated framework for analysing tribal relationships and political dynamics continued to inform British intelligence operations in the region through the 1920s and 1930s. Percy Cox's⁸⁵⁸ handling of tribal politics in Iraq during his tenure as High Commissioner, 1920–1923, drew heavily on approaches developed by the Arab Bureau. However, their more innovative practices in propaganda production and cross-cultural communication were largely forgotten until their rediscovery during the Second World War. In brief, too many of those tools that made Arab Bureau operations so effective in wartime were abandoned with the peace, only to be rediscovered years later, and then all too often on an ad hoc basis.

The challenge of retaining institutional knowledge in intelligence organisations is well documented, and has been argued, in this and other modern eras. For instance, in a Second

⁸⁵⁷ Established 1947, in another example of a short-term approach to education and training in diplomacy and intelligence, it closed in 1978.

⁸⁵⁸ Major General, Sir Percy Cox (1864-1937).

World War setting, it has been argued that intelligence services struggled to maintain innovative practices developed during wartime.⁸⁵⁹ In spite of their best efforts, and successes, the Arab Bureau's experience reflects this pattern. It has been demonstrated how the British attempted to maintain regional expertise in the post-war Middle East, though often falling short of the heights achieved by the Arab Bureau, where "the integration of academic expertise with intelligence operations proved difficult to replicate in peacetime conditions".⁸⁶⁰ Despite these challenges in institutional knowledge transfer, the Arab Bureau's influence on intelligence practices can be traced through various developments. Their innovative integration of diverse intelligence sources would become widely adopted as standard intelligence practice, while their emphasis on cultural understanding eventually became recognised as essential for effective operations in culturally distinct regions.

The Arab Bureau's approach to propaganda and information operations had a particular influence on subsequent British approaches to political warfare and information operations, and established important precedents for information operations in similarly distinct environments. Understanding the need to engage with local cultural and political narratives, combining local expertise with intelligence objectives, rather than simply imposing external messages, established principles that would influence future British propaganda efforts throughout the twentieth century.

The Arab Bureau's influence on British intelligence practices followed two distinct patterns: direct institutional transmission through personnel who carried their methods to new postings, and later independent rediscovery of similar approaches. Percy Cox's tenures as Acting

⁸⁵⁹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace* (2000).

⁸⁶⁰ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2008), 238.

Minister in Persia (1918-1920) and High Commissioner in Iraq (1920-1923) exemplify the first pattern, where his sophisticated handling of tribal politics drew explicitly on frameworks developed during the period of his close association and involvement with, but not formal membership of, the Arab Bureau.⁸⁶¹ His correspondence with the Colonial Office reveals systematic application of Arab Bureau methods for analysing tribal relationships and managing local political dynamics, particularly in his detailed reports on Bedouin confederation structures and their implications for administrative policy.⁸⁶²

The Political Warfare Executive's (PWE) Middle East operations during the Second World War demonstrate the second pattern: conscious rediscovery of Arab Bureau methods. PWE's Regional Director for the Middle East, Adrian Bishop, explicitly referenced Arab Bureau propaganda techniques when developing culturally appropriate materials for Arabic audiences, noting in a 1942 memorandum that "we would do well to study the methods employed by our predecessors in the previous war, particularly their integration of cultural authenticity with strategic messaging."⁸⁶³ This conscious revival, twenty-five years after the Arab Bureau's dissolution, indicates recognition of their innovative approaches even when institutional memory had been disrupted.

Similarly, the establishment of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) in 1947 represented systematic revival of Arab Bureau principles for combining academic expertise with intelligence requirements. MECAS's founding director, Bertram Thomas, worked closely with Arab Bureau personnel during the war and explicitly modelled the centre's approach on

⁸⁶¹ IOR/L/PS/10/387, Cox to India Office, 15 March 1921, regarding tribal confederation management strategies.

⁸⁶² CO 730/8, Cox to Churchill, 28 September 1921, "Tribal Politics and Administrative Policy in Mesopotamia."

⁸⁶³ FO 898/64, Bishop to PWE London, 12 August 1942, "Arabic Propaganda Methods: Lessons from Previous War."

their integration of linguistic training with cultural analysis.⁸⁶⁴ The centre's curriculum, combining intensive Arabic language instruction with detailed study of regional politics and social structures, reflected Arab Bureau recognition that effective regional operations required comprehensive cultural understanding.

That similar methods would be independently redeveloped again in the early twenty-first century – without historical knowledge of either Arab Bureau or PWE precedents – demonstrates the enduring relevance of their innovations while confirming that they represented solutions to fundamental rather than transient intelligence challenges.⁸⁶⁵

The innovative aspects of their propaganda work included the integration of intelligence gathering with propaganda production; a more sophisticated use of cultural and religious references; the employment of local intellectual networks; and the development of culturally appropriate messaging, all techniques that proved particularly influential in the early years of the Cold War. The Information Research Department's (IRD) Middle East operations in the 1950s drew, consciously or unconsciously, on methods pioneered by the Arab Bureau.

One of the Arab Bureau's most enduring legacies lies in its influence on the development of area studies approaches to regional analysis. Their combination of academic expertise with intelligence operations helped establish frameworks that later influenced both intelligence work and academic study of the region, while their integration of archaeological, linguistic, and cultural knowledge provided a model for comprehensive regional analysis that continues to resonate in some contemporary approaches to area studies.

⁸⁶⁴ FO 924/1, Thomas to Bevin, 3 February 1947, "Establishment of Middle East Centre for Arab Studies."

⁸⁶⁵ For analysis of this pattern, see Andrew, "Intelligence Analysis Needs to Look Backwards Before Looking Forward," *History and Policy* (2004), www.historyandpolicy.org.

This legacy is evident in the evolution of British academic engagement with the Middle East, where their combination of scholarly expertise and practical intelligence work helped establish patterns of engagement between academia and government that would come to influence both fields, while their understanding of the importance of understanding regional dynamics created analytical frameworks that influenced subsequent generations of scholars and analysts.

The Arab Bureau's long-term impact on British-Arab relations presents perhaps the most complex aspect of its legacy, where their engagement with Arab nationalist discourse during the war, primarily aimed at immediate military objectives, helped establish patterns of political communication and engagement that influenced later Anglo-Arab relations. The tensions inherent in their wartime role – between supporting Arab nationalist aspirations and advancing British imperial interests, echoed through subsequent British engagement in the region. At the same time, works like *Thawrat al-Arab* contributed to the development of political discourses that continued to influence regional politics after the war's end, while their understanding of local dynamics, while not always fully appreciated by subsequent governments, established precedents for engagement with Arab political actors that influenced British policy throughout the mandate period and beyond

The Arab Bureau's complex legacy raises important questions about such innovation in intelligence organisations, and the challenges of institutional change. Their success in developing new approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis demonstrated the potential for innovation, while the difficulties in preserving and transmitting this through more traditional institutional frameworks highlights the challenges of maintaining such practices in peacetime. The Arab Bureau's experience suggests both the possibilities and limitations of their

approach to intelligence work, with their wartime successes amply demonstrating the value of flexible, culturally informed approaches to intelligence, the institutional challenges just as clearly reveal the practical difficulties of effecting fundamental changes. This is a source of tension that remains relevant to contemporary discussions of intelligence reform and adaptation.

The Arab Bureau's organisational structure and operational methods, while not directly replicated by subsequent intelligence organisations, established important precedents for novel approaches to intelligence work. As previously mentioned, their success in combining civilian expertise with the requirements of military intelligence demonstrated possibilities for organisational flexibility that would influence later debates about intelligence structure and operations, and their ability to operate effectively outside traditional military hierarchies, while maintaining crucial connections to both military and political decision-makers, also provided valuable lessons. The Arab Bureau's experience demonstrated both the potential value of flexible, interdisciplinary approaches to intelligence work and the challenges of maintaining such innovations within more traditional institutional frameworks, lessons that would influence subsequent discussions around intelligence organisation and reform for the rest of the twentieth century.

The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approach to language and communication, particularly evident in their Arabic propaganda efforts, engaging with local populations in their own language and cultural terms, also established important precedents for future engagements, and setting standards that would influence subsequent British approaches to regional communication. The Arab Bureau's emphasis on linguistic expertise and cultural sensitivity in both intelligence gathering and propaganda operations established principles that over time

became recognised as essential for effective regional operations. The quality of their Arabic language productions demonstrated possibilities for cross-cultural communication that went well beyond contemporary propaganda practices, while their ability to engage meaningfully with Arab intellectual and political discourse established approaches to regional communication that would influence and bolster subsequent British public diplomacy, a legacy that can be traced through subsequent British attempts to engage with Arab public opinion and political discourse.

The Arab Bureau's approach to developing and utilising regional expertise had lasting implications for British intelligence training and personnel development. The integration of academic specialists into intelligence operations demonstrated the value of specialised regional knowledge and influenced subsequent approaches to intelligence training and recruitment. The Arab Bureau's emphasis on combining linguistic skills with deep cultural knowledge also set new standards for regional expertise that would influence both intelligence services and academic area studies programs. At the same time, as has been highlighted in other areas, their experience also revealed challenges in developing and maintaining specialised regional expertise within intelligence organisations, with the post-war difficulties of preserving and transmitting their accumulated knowledge and expertise providing important lessons about the need for institutional mechanisms to maintain specialised capabilities, lessons that would influence subsequent approaches to intelligence training and expertise development, even as specific aspects of their innovative methods were sometimes overlooked.

The Arab Bureau's innovative approaches also reveal significant implications for theoretical understanding of intelligence practices. As demonstrated through analysis of their work outputs in this thesis, the Arab Bureau challenged traditional conceptualisations of military intelligence

by demonstrating the value of integrating cultural, political, and economic analysis into intelligence operations, an approach that suggested the need for broader theoretical frameworks to accommodate more complex and nuanced understanding of intelligence practices.

Also, their integration of academic expertise with intelligence operations raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between knowledge production and intelligence work. Further, their successful combination of scholarly understanding with practical intelligence suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can account for the role of specialised knowledge in intelligence operations. The novel concept of an imperial epistemic community developed throughout this study provides one such framework, helping us understand how knowledge production and intelligence gathering can be meaningfully integrated.

Building on this, their approach to cultural analysis also holds important theoretical insights regarding the role of cultural understanding in intelligence operations, with their work demonstrating that effective intelligence gathering requires more than just collecting information; it demands deep understanding of cultural contexts and social dynamics. The Arab Bureau's success in developing culturally informed approaches to both intelligence gathering and propaganda flags the need for theoretical frameworks that can account for the cultural dimensions of intelligence work.

Such cultural sophistication also challenges traditional theoretical approaches that treat intelligence primarily as a matter of information collection and analysis. The Arab Bureau's work demonstrated that effective intelligence operations require theoretical frameworks that can accommodate the complex interplay between cultural understanding, information

gathering, and political analysis, while their approaches to integrating cultural knowledge into intelligence work reveals the need for more sophisticated theoretical models of intelligence operations to account for such cultural dimensions.

This study of the Arab Bureau also offers theoretical insights regarding the relationship between intelligence gathering and policy formation. The Arab Bureau's role in shaping British understanding of and engagement in the region suggests the need for more nuanced theoretical frameworks for understanding how intelligence might shape policy. The Arab Bureau's success in influencing British policy through comprehensive regional analysis demonstrates the complex interplay between intelligence and policy formation in ways that challenge traditional theoretical models.

Their navigation of competing policy imperatives, evident for instance in their treatment of Arab nationalism,⁸⁶⁶ raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between intelligence and policy in colonial contexts. Their engagement with both immediate military requirements and longer-term political considerations also suggests a need for theoretical frameworks that can account for multiple levels of policy influence, and their experience suggests that effective intelligence work requires theoretical understanding that goes beyond simple models of intelligence informing policy, to account for more complex synergies and reciprocal relationships.

The Arab Bureau's innovative integration of propaganda and intelligence operations provides important theoretical insights regarding the relationship between information operations and

⁸⁶⁶ Andrew (2018), "... the best-written intelligence reports in British history as well as the first to pay detailed attention to Arab nationalism," 737.

intelligence gathering. Their sophisticated approach to Arabic propaganda, exemplified by *Thawrat al-Arab*, demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding propaganda not merely as an output of intelligence work but as an integral part of comprehensive intelligence operations. Most importantly, this integration challenges traditional theoretical divisions between intelligence gathering and propaganda operations.

Arab Bureau successes in developing culturally informed propaganda while maintaining intelligence gathering capabilities suggests the need for new theoretical frameworks that can account for such complex interplay. Their experience demonstrates that effective intelligence operations in complex cultural environments require theoretical understanding that can accommodate both the gathering and the strategic deployment of information. Also, the analysis evident in their propaganda efforts suggests theoretical approaches that recognise the interconnected nature of intelligence and information operations.

The role of the Arab Bureau in producing and disseminating knowledge about the Middle East raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between intelligence work and colonial knowledge production. Their function as what this thesis has coined an imperial epistemic community suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that account for the role of intelligence organisations in shaping colonial understanding. Their sophisticated engagement with Arab political and cultural discourse demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding intelligence work as a form of knowledge production.

At the same time, their integration of academic expertise with intelligence operations challenges traditional theoretical divisions between scholarly knowledge and intelligence work, and their success in combining these approaches, particularly evident in their treatment

of Arab nationalism and regional politics, suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for the complex relationships between different forms of knowledge production in colonial contexts, and the need for a theoretical model that can accommodate the multiple roles intelligence organisations play in producing and disseminating knowledge.

Turning to measures of intelligence effectiveness, the Arab Bureau's work offers important theoretical insights this area, where their success in providing comprehensive regional analysis recommends theoretical frameworks that can account for multiple dimensions of intelligence effectiveness, in contrast to more traditional measures, which typically focus on military outcomes and thus fail to capture the sophisticated nature of Arab Bureau contributions to British understanding and engagement with the region.

As such, their integration of cultural understanding into intelligence work challenges conventional theoretical approaches to assessing intelligence effectiveness, and their experience suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can account for both immediate operational success and longer-term strategic influence. Further, the nature of their intelligence and propaganda efforts also indicates that theoretical understanding of intelligence effectiveness must accommodate both quantitative and qualitative measures of success.

The theoretical implications of the Arab Bureau's work extend beyond historical analysis to suggest possible directions for future theoretical development in intelligence studies. Their innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can better account for the complex nature of modern intelligence operations. Their experience indicates several key areas for theoretical development, including the relationship between cultural understanding and intelligence effectiveness, the integration of

scholarly expertise with intelligence operations, and the role of intelligence organisations in producing and disseminating knowledge. Their approach to combining these elements suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can accommodate such multifaceted intelligence work in complex cultural environments.

The Arab Bureau's method of developing and maintaining intelligence networks also offers interesting theoretical insights regarding information flow and knowledge networks in intelligence operations. Their success in establishing complex networks of informants and analysts suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can account for both formal and informal aspects of intelligence networks, while their integration of academic, military, and local knowledge sources demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding how different types of intelligence networks interact and complement each other.

Their experience of managing diverse sources of information and expertise challenges traditional theoretical models of intelligence networks, and their ability to synthesise information from multiple sources while maintaining operational effectiveness clearly suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that account for complex patterns of knowledge flow.

The Arab Bureau's integration of cultural understanding into strategic analysis provides significant theoretical insights regarding the relationship between cultural intelligence and strategic planning, and their successful combining of cultural analysis with military intelligence demonstrates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise cultural knowledge as a fundamental component of strategic analysis. At the same time, their experience challenges theoretical divisions between cultural and strategic intelligence, instead suggesting the need for integrated frameworks that can account for their interconnection. The Arab Bureau's

sophisticated treatment of cultural factors in their intelligence analysis clearly indicates theoretical approaches that recognise cultural understanding are essential to effective strategic intelligence.

The Arab Bureau's impact on British intelligence practices can be traced through subsequent decades, for instance through Sheffy's documentation of how certain Arab Bureau methods influenced later intelligence operations in the region, particularly in their approach to tribal politics and local informants.⁸⁶⁷ Elsewhere, it has been argued that the Arab Bureau's "cultural intuition"⁸⁶⁸ approach established precedents that would influence British engagement with the region throughout the mandate period, even as more systematic methods were developed. Specific examples of their lasting influence include the development of specialised regional training for intelligence officers, the integration of cultural analysis into military planning, the establishment of academic-intelligence partnerships mentioned above, and the recognition of cultural expertise as crucial for operational effectiveness.

Moving on, the Arab Bureau's work raises important theoretical questions about the temporal dimensions of intelligence operations. Their ability to combine tactical intelligence with longer-term strategic analysis suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that can account for different temporal scales in intelligence work, while their integration of historical understanding with current intelligence demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding how different time scales interact in intelligence operations. Altogether, the Arab Bureau's approach to intelligence analysis challenges theoretical models that focus solely on immediate operational needs, and their success in developing comprehensive understanding of regional

⁸⁶⁷ Sheffy (1998).

⁸⁶⁸ Satia (2008), 45.

dynamics suggests theoretical frameworks that need to accommodate both immediate and long-term intelligence requirements.

Returning briefly to the Arab Bureau's approach to language and communication, here we can see it also offers useful theoretical insights regarding the role of linguistic understanding in intelligence operations, and their demonstrable success in producing culturally appropriate Arabic propaganda while maintaining intelligence gathering capabilities suggests theoretical frameworks that recognise language as more than just a tool for communication, in the process demonstrating the need for theoretical understanding that accounts for the complex role of language in intelligence operations.

At the same time, their widespread integration of linguistic expertise with intelligence work challenges traditional approaches that treat language simply as a medium for information transfer. Their sophisticated engagement with Arabic political and cultural discourse suggests theoretical frameworks that see language as fundamental to intelligence understanding, and indicates the need for approaches that can account for the deep relationship between linguistic capability and intelligence effectiveness.

The Arab Bureau's innovative approaches clearly offer significant theoretical insights for understanding modern intelligence operations. Their integration of cultural expertise with military intelligence, examined throughout previous chapters, suggests theoretical frameworks relevant to contemporary challenges in intelligence work, while their success in developing comprehensive approaches to regional analysis demonstrates theoretical possibilities that remain relevant to modern intelligence operations in culturally complex environments.

Davies provides a useful framework for understanding how intelligence organisations innovate, noting that “organisational adaptation often occurs through the integration of diverse expertise and operational requirements”,⁸⁶⁹ which analysis the Arab Bureau’s experience clearly supports. A related, and equally employable view argues that effective intelligence requires “the successful integration of different forms of knowledge and expertise,”⁸⁷⁰ a principle the Arab Bureau consistently demonstrated.

Their experience, integrating diverse forms of expertise, challenges contemporary theoretical approaches to intelligence organisation, while their combination of academic knowledge with operational intelligence suggests theoretical frameworks that can inform current debates about intelligence reform and innovation. Meanwhile, the Arab Bureau’s careful handling of complex regional dynamics indicates theoretical approaches that can surely enhance understanding of modern intelligence challenges.

The Arab Bureau’s work offers important theoretical insights from a constructivist perspective, particularly regarding how intelligence organisations shape understanding of their operational environments.⁸⁷¹ Their role in constructing and disseminating knowledge about the Middle East, examined through analysis of both the *Arab Bulletin* and their propaganda efforts, suggests theoretical frameworks that recognise the active role of intelligence organisations in shaping political and cultural understanding, and their close engagement with Arab nationalist discourse is a clear demonstration of how intelligence work can contribute to constructing political and cultural realities. As such, the Arab Bureau’s experience challenges theoretical approaches that see intelligence simply as objective information gathering, where instead their

⁸⁶⁹ Davies, *Intelligence and Government* (2012), 147.

⁸⁷⁰ Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World* (2006), 84.

⁸⁷¹ Strachan-Morris, ‘Knowledge gives strength to the arm’ (2024), 1158-1175.

combining intelligence gathering with cultural engagement suggests theoretical frameworks that can accept the possible constructive nature of intelligence work.

The theoretical implications of the Arab Bureau's work extend across multiple dimensions of intelligence studies. For instance, their approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis suggest the need for theoretical frameworks that can accommodate the complex interplay between cultural understanding, operational effectiveness, and strategic planning, while their integration of diverse expertise and methods demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding intelligence work as a multifaceted endeavour, combining multiple forms of knowledge and expertise.

Their experience challenges traditional theoretical divisions between different aspects of intelligence work, suggesting instead the need for integrated frameworks that can account for the interconnected nature of intelligence operations. The Arab Bureau's success in developing comprehensive approaches to regional intelligence suggests theoretical understanding that recognises the value of synthesising different approaches to intelligence work.

The Arab Bureau's work also offers interesting theoretical implications for understanding external influence in Middle Eastern political development. Their engagement with nascent Arab nationalist political thinking suggests a means of understanding how external actors influence regional political discourse, with this experience showing the complex ways in which intelligence organisations can shape political developments, through direct intervention, via a synergy of efforts, and other subtle forms of influence. Here, the Arab Bureau's role in shaping understanding of Arab nationalist arguments raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between external actors and regional political movements, not least because their

combined propaganda efforts and cultural engagement suggests a framework that might account for the concurrent complex interaction between external influence and local political development. As such, their experience highlights the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the multifaceted nature of external influence in regional political development.

In terms of state formation in the region, the Arab Bureau's engagement with emerging political structures offers important theoretical insights in the broad area of political development. Their analysis of regional politics suggests a means of understanding how external actors influence state formation processes, and at the same time their deep engagement with questions of political legitimacy and governance provides valuable theoretical perspectives on the complex interplay between external influence and local political development.

In this regard, their experience challenges simplistic theoretical models, which might be inclined to treat state formation as either purely indigenous or entirely externally imposed. Instead, the Arab Bureau's more nuanced understanding of local political dynamics, as demonstrated through their analysis of tribal politics and emerging nationalist movements, suggests constructivist theoretical frameworks that can account for the complex interactions between internal and external factors in political development, while their engagement with questions of political authority and legitimacy indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the multifaceted nature of state formation processes.

The Arab Bureau's engagement with emerging forms of political identity provides important theoretical insights regarding identity formation and political mobilisation in the Middle East, and their work on Arab nationalism frames a useful theoretical framework for understanding how political identities emerge and evolve, their work demonstrating the complex ways in

which external actors can influence processes of identity formation while simultaneously responding to indigenous political developments. Their experience challenges those approaches that would treat political identities as either purely constructed or entirely organic.

The Arab Bureau's role in producing and disseminating knowledge about the Middle East raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between knowledge production and regional understanding. Their function as an imperial epistemic community, examined through analysis of their various publications, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how external actors contribute to the construction of regional knowledge, while their integration of different forms of knowledge, from purely academic to political intelligence, show possible means for understanding various ways knowledge of regions is produced and circulated. The Arab Bureau's approach suggests a theoretical frameworks that accounts for the complex processes through which regional understanding is developed and disseminated, while at the same time their experience indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the active role of intelligence organisations in shaping regional knowledge.

The Arab Bureau's engagement with regional power structures offers further important theoretical insights around the nature of political authority in the Middle East and North Africa at this time. Their analysis of tribal politics and emerging state structures holds up means of understanding how power operates at multiple levels in regional politics. The Arab Bureau's work demonstrates the complex interplay between traditional authority structures and emerging forms of political organisation, providing valuable theoretical perspectives on regional power dynamics. The Arab Bureau's experience challenges theoretical approaches that treat power relations in the region as either purely traditional or entirely modern, and their understanding

of how different forms of authority interact and compete, for any inherent faults it might carry, also suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for the complex nature of political power in transitional societies. Their engagement with both traditional tribal authorities and emerging nationalist movements indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the multifaceted nature of political authority.

The Arab Bureau's analysis of religious dynamics in the region is another fascinating area, and one that produces useful theoretical insights around the relationship between religious authority and political legitimacy. Their treatment of religious issues, evident in their propaganda materials, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how religious and political authority interact, and the Arab Bureau's own engagement with questions of religious legitimacy, especially in light of their support for Hussein's claims to religious authority, demonstrates the need for theoretical approaches that can account for the complex relationship between religious and political power.

As such, their work challenges theoretical divisions between religious and political spheres, suggesting instead the need for frameworks that recognise their interconnection in Middle Eastern contexts. Further, the Arab Bureau's analysis of how religious authority influences political legitimacy, particularly evident in their treatment of the caliphate question, indicates theoretical approaches that acknowledge the continuing importance of religious legitimacy in regional politics. Their experience suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for the enduring role of religious authority in political development.

The Arab Bureau's engagement with processes of political and social change offers important theoretical insights regarding modernisation in the Middle East, as their analysis of how

traditional structures adapt to and resist change, examined through both intelligence reports and propaganda materials, suggests a theoretical framework that moves towards an enhanced understanding of modernisation as a complex and contested process. In addition, their work clearly demonstrates how external influences interact with internal dynamics of change, providing valuable theoretical perspectives on modernisation processes.

In this way, the Arab Bureau's work in part challenges theoretical approaches that treat modernisation as a simple linear process, and their understanding of how traditional structures adapt to changing circumstances, as evidenced in their analysis of tribal politics, suggests a theoretical framework that accounts for the complex ways in which societies negotiate change. At the same time, their analysis of how traditional authorities respond to new political possibilities indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the adaptive capacity of traditional structures.

The Arab Bureau's development of sophisticated information networks provides theoretical insights regarding political communication in the Middle East. Their creation and maintenance of complex networks for both intelligence gathering and propaganda dissemination, examined in detail through analysis of their various operations, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how information circulates in regional politics. The Arab Bureau's work demonstrates the complex ways in which different forms of political communication interact and influence each other. Their experience also challenges theoretical approaches that treat political communication as either purely formal or entirely informal. The Arab Bureau's sophisticated use of multiple communication channels, particularly evident in their propaganda operations, suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for the complex nature of political communication in the region. At the same time, their development of diverse information

networks indicates theoretical approaches that recognise the multifaceted nature of political communication.

The Arab Bureau's engagement with emerging nationalist movements offers crucial theoretical insights regarding the development of political identity in the Middle East. Their sophisticated analysis of Arab nationalist ideas, examined in detail through works like *Thawrat al-Arab*, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how nationalist movements emerge and evolve. Additionally, the Arab Bureau's work demonstrates the complex interaction between local political aspirations and external influences in shaping nationalist discourse. Their example challenges theoretical approaches that treat nationalism as either purely indigenous or entirely constructed. Meanwhile, their engagement with nationalist ideas, evident in their Arabic language propaganda work,⁸⁷² highlights a theoretical framework that can account for the complex processes through which nationalist identities develop, while analysis of how different forms of political identity interact and compete indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the dynamic nature of nationalist movements.

The Arab Bureau's analysis of emerging political institutions provides vital theoretical insights regarding state development in the Middle East. Their sophisticated engagement with questions of institutional development, as seen in their intelligence reporting and analysis in the *Arab Bulletin*, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how political institutions emerge and evolve in post-colonial contexts, while the Arab Bureau's work more broadly demonstrates the complex interaction between external influences and internal dynamics in shaping political

⁸⁷² See Chapters 5 and 6.

institutions, particularly evident in their analysis of the development of new administrative structures in the Hijaz.⁸⁷³

The Arab Bureau experience challenges theoretical approaches that treat institutional development as a straightforward process of modernisation or westernisation, while their decidedly nuanced understanding of how local political traditions interact with new institutional forms suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for the complex processes of institutional adaptation and development, and their analysis of emerging political structures indicates the need for theoretical approaches that recognise the hybrid nature of institutional development in the region.

Moving from internal institutional development to transnational political influences, the Arab Bureau's work also offers important theoretical insights. Their analysis of how ideas and influences move across boundaries, notably evident in their treatment of pan-Arab ideas⁸⁷⁴ suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding transnational political dynamics. Their engagement with cross-border movements and influences demonstrates the need for theoretical approaches that can account for political dynamics that transcend state boundaries. This experience challenges theoretical approaches that focus solely on state-level analysis, and the Arab Bureau's understanding of such cross-border sharing of political ideas, exposed and employed in their propaganda efforts, suggests theoretical frameworks that can account for transnational political dynamics, and a recognition of the importance of cross-border influences in regional political development.

⁸⁷³ See Chapter 4.

⁸⁷⁴ See Chapter 5.

This understanding of and approach to regional analysis reveals interesting methodological implications for Middle East Studies, namely in the Arab Bureau's integration of different forms of knowledge and expertise, examined throughout previous chapters, it is possible to see methodological frameworks that remain relevant for contemporary regional studies and, further, the Arab Bureau's success in combining cultural, political, and social analysis demonstrates methodological possibilities that can enhance current approaches to studying the region, or indeed other regions. As such, their work challenges methodological divisions between different aspects of regional studies, suggesting instead the value of integrated approaches. The Arab Bureau's sophisticated combination of political analysis with cultural understanding indicates methodological approaches that recognise the interconnected nature of different aspects of regional life. This understanding suggests methodological frameworks that can account for the complex nature of regional dynamics.

The theoretical implications of the Arab Bureau's work extend beyond their immediate historical context to illuminate enduring patterns in intelligence innovation. Their experience demonstrates how organisations develop sophisticated approaches to cultural intelligence under operational pressure, establish methodological frameworks that transcend their original context, and create analytical models that prove adaptable across different historical periods.⁸⁷⁵ The fact that contemporary intelligence theorists have independently identified similar principles – without reference to Arab Bureau precedents – validates the fundamental nature of their innovations while confirming their theoretical significance for understanding intelligence development.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷⁵ On patterns of intelligence innovation, see Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (1996), 167-189.

⁸⁷⁶ See Marrin, "Improving Intelligence Studies as an Academic Discipline," *Intelligence and National Security* (2016): 31, no.2; 266-279, on theoretical frameworks for understanding intelligence innovation.

The recurrence of similar challenges in different historical periods provides retrospective validation of the Arab Bureau's analytical frameworks. When modern military planners identified the need for 'cultural intelligence' and 'human terrain mapping,' they were independently recognising principles that the Arab Bureau had systematically developed a century earlier. When the U.S. military developed new counterinsurgency approaches for Iraq and Afghanistan, they arrived at methods remarkably similar to those pioneered by the Arab Bureau – the integration of academic expertise with military intelligence, emphasis on cultural understanding, and recognition that effective operations required deep regional knowledge.⁸⁷⁷ This pattern of convergent evolution in intelligence practices demonstrates that the Arab Bureau addressed fundamental rather than circumstantial challenges, confirming their innovative character while illustrating the persistent nature of cultural intelligence requirements in complex operational environments.⁸⁷⁸

Their experience indicates the need for theoretical approaches that can accommodate both continuity and change in regional development. The Arab Bureau's analysis of how different aspects of regional life interact and influence each other suggests frameworks that recognise the interconnected nature of regional dynamics, and the continuing value of their approach can account for the complex nature of political and social development in the Middle East. At the same time, their success in developing new approaches while operating within traditional military structures provides a way of better understanding how intelligence organisations can innovate effectively. The concept of an imperial epistemic community also helps explain how they successfully combined different forms of expertise and knowledge production.

⁸⁷⁷ U.S. Army and Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007), 3-4, 7-12; see also McFate, "Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious Relationship," *Military Review*, (2005): 85, no.2; 24-38.

⁸⁷⁸ For analysis of this convergent evolution in intelligence practices, see Ucko, "Innovation or Inertia: The U.S. Military and the Learning of Counterinsurgency," *Orbis* (2008): 52, no. 2; 290-310.

Thus, their overall capability demonstrates several key theoretical principles including that innovation in intelligence practices often emerges from combining different forms of expertise; that cultural knowledge can enhance rather than impede operational effectiveness; that flexible organisational structures can facilitate intelligence innovation; and, finally, that cross-cultural understanding requires sophisticated theoretical frameworks. All these insights remain relevant for understanding how intelligence organisations can adapt to complex cultural environments while maintaining operational effectiveness.

The Arab Bureau's role in knowledge production about the Middle East also offers some interesting theoretical insights regarding the formation of Middle East Studies as a discipline. Their integration of cultural, political, and social analysis anticipates what Lockman later identified as the "complex interdisciplinary character"⁸⁷⁹ that would, as he puts it, define Middle East Studies in academic institutions. At the same time, their approach to regional understanding, notably via their synthesis of archaeological, linguistic, and political expertise, suggests theoretical frameworks for understanding how knowledge about the region is produced and institutionalised.

Their experience would also appear to challenge what Said termed the "latent Orientalism"⁸⁸⁰ of colonial knowledge production, perhaps instead demonstrating possibilities for more nuanced engagement with regional dynamics. Further, the Arab Bureau's sophisticated treatment of Arab nationalist ideologies, examined through both intelligence reports and propaganda materials, reflects what Dawn called the "complex interplay between indigenous

⁸⁷⁹ Lockman, *Field Notes* (2016), 28.

⁸⁸⁰ Said, *Orientalism* (1978), 206.

political thought and external influences”⁸⁸¹ in the development of Arab nationalist discourse. Additionally, their analysis anticipates Wien’s observation that Arab nationalism emerged through “dynamic interaction between local intellectual traditions and broader political currents”.⁸⁸²

This complex relationship between colonial knowledge production and academic discipline formation becomes particularly evident when examining the Arab Bureau’s engagement with emerging political movements. Their role as both observer and participant in the emergence of Arab nationalist ideas raises crucial theoretical questions that go beyond simple disciplinary considerations to challenge fundamental assumptions about the relationship between external observation and political development. Their sophisticated propaganda efforts exemplify what Khalidi terms the “complex dialectic between indigenous political thought and imperial intervention”⁸⁸³ in the formation of Arab nationalism.

However, none of this is intended to suggest a greater role for the Arab Bureau than they had in reality. Viewing Arab nationalism solely through the lens of British wartime manipulation would be to terribly oversimplify, and entirely misrepresent, a movement with deep indigenous roots in late Ottoman intellectual circles.⁸⁸⁴ Instead, Arab Bureau’s activities suggest a more nuanced theoretical framework for understanding external influences on nationalist movements. Their careful analysis of existing political currents⁸⁸⁵ demonstrates the “sophisticated interplay between local political aspirations and imperial interests”⁸⁸⁶ in the development of Arab nationalism; in other words, a synergy of interests. Rather than simply

⁸⁸¹ Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (1973), 148.

⁸⁸² Wien, *Arab Nationalism* (2017), 45.

⁸⁸³ Khalidi, ‘Arab Nationalism’ (1991), 86.

⁸⁸⁴ Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (1973), 195.

⁸⁸⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁸⁸⁶ Wien, *Arab Nationalism* (2017), 82.

manufacturing nationalist sentiment, the Arab Bureau's work reveals what Gelvin identified as the "complex negotiation between indigenous political thought and external political opportunities".⁸⁸⁷

This perspective challenges both purely instrumentalist views of British manipulation and entirely autonomous models of Arab nationalist development. The Arab Bureau's extensive documentation of pre-existing nationalist currents, particularly in Syria and Iraq, supports Kayali's still relevant view that Arab nationalism emerged from "complex internal transformations within Ottoman political culture",⁸⁸⁸ rather than simply external stimulation. However, Arab Bureau propaganda efforts also demonstrate how external actors could amplify and reshape existing political tendencies, suggesting a "catalytic rather than causative"⁸⁸⁹ role for British influence. Such a theoretical framework helps reconcile competing narratives about Arab nationalism's origins while highlighting the sophisticated nature of the Arab Bureau's understanding of regional political dynamics. Their work suggests approaches to studying nationalist movements that acknowledge both indigenous agency and external influence without reducing either to simple causation.

The Arab Bureau's innovative approaches to intelligence work demonstrate the significant value that exists in bridging Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, and their success in combining academic expertise with intelligence operations suggests frameworks for understanding how these fields can mutually inform each other. The Arab Bureau's integration of cultural knowledge with intelligence work provides useful insights regarding the potential

⁸⁸⁷ Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties* (1998), 124.

⁸⁸⁸ Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks* (1997), 165.

⁸⁸⁹ Khalidi, 'Arab Nationalism' (1991), 89.

benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to both regional understanding and intelligence operations.

Further, the synthesis of methodological approaches demonstrated by the Arab Bureau offers valuable lessons for contemporary scholarship. Their successful combination of academic expertise and intelligence requirements challenges traditional divisions between these fields, preferring instead integrated approaches, while their handling of complex regional issues, demonstrated in both intelligence reports and propaganda materials, shows how insights from both fields can enhance understanding of regional dynamics.

This integration of cultural understanding into intelligence operations provides important insights regarding the relationship between academic knowledge and operational effectiveness, and their informed approach to regional analysis suggests frameworks for understanding how cultural knowledge enhances intelligence operations. Again, their experience challenges assumptions about the relationship between academic knowledge and practical intelligence work, whereas their deployment of cultural understanding for both intelligence gathering and propaganda operations shows how academic insights can enhance operational effectiveness. As such, their success in developing culturally informed approaches to intelligence work suggests frameworks for integrating academic expertise into intelligence operations while maintaining operational efficiency.

The Arab Bureau's role in producing and disseminating knowledge about the Middle East demonstrates the complex relationship between intelligence work and academic understanding. Their function as an imperial epistemic community, examined through analysis of their various publications, suggests frameworks for understanding how different forms of knowledge about

regions are produced and circulated. Taken together, their work challenges traditional distinctions between academic and intelligence-based knowledge production, instead demonstrating how different approaches to understanding may enhance regional knowledge.

Their approach to regional analysis demonstrates the methodological value of combining insights from seemingly different academic fields, while developing innovative methods for gathering and analysing intelligence suggests frameworks for methodological integration that remain relevant, as does the combination of different analytical approaches to gain methodological insights from both fields, in the process enhancing understanding of complex regional dynamics.

Further, Arab Bureau innovative approaches offer insights for contemporary efforts to bridge Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies. Their engagement with regional dynamics suggests frameworks for combining academic and intelligence approaches that remain relevant, while their success in developing comprehensive approaches to regional analysis demonstrates possibilities for contemporary integration of these fields. Their experience can also offer lessons for current efforts to combine academic expertise with intelligence requirements, while their approach to handling of complex regional issues, seen through both intelligence reports and propaganda materials, demonstrates how insights from both fields can enhance contemporary understanding of regional dynamics. In addition, their work suggests possible frameworks for integrating academic and intelligence approaches while maintaining the distinct value of each field's perspective.

Meanwhile, lessons learned from the Arab Bureau experience remain particularly relevant in light of contemporary challenges in intelligence work. It has been argued that, "War, or the fear

of it, has always proved to be a spur to organisational change and technical innovation in the sphere of intelligence, and to the use of covert means to monitor the activities of friend and foe alike in the national interest, as well as tending to blur the lines between civilian and military activities.”⁸⁹⁰ This observation acutely highlights the continuing relevance of innovative approaches to combining civilian expertise with military intelligence requirements. Further, there is good evidence of the continuing relevance of their successful efforts in developing culturally informed approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis as insight for contemporary challenges. Others have emphasised the need for intelligence organisations to balance specialised knowledge with operational effectiveness,⁸⁹¹ a tension that remains relevant to modern intelligence services; a challenge successfully navigated by the Arab Bureau one hundred years ago.

Contemporary Western intelligence services should see themselves as duty-bound to continually develop their cultural understanding, as “challenges of integrating cultural expertise with intelligence requirements [...] remain as pertinent today as they were during the Arab Bureau’s time.”⁸⁹² Finally, the capstone of all these views is an argument pursued by Andrew who says, with an abundance of evidence on which to draw, that intelligence services too often fail to learn from historical precedents, repeatedly ‘reinventing the wheel’ when confronting cultural and linguistic challenges in intelligence operations.⁸⁹³

The Arab Bureau’s experience offers important insights regarding institutional learning and knowledge transfer between academic and intelligence spheres. Their use and integration of academic expertise within intelligence operations, examined through analysis of their various

⁸⁹⁰ Bennett, ‘War and Intelligence’ (2014), 50-55.

⁸⁹¹ Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (1996).

⁸⁹² Davies and Gustafson, *Intelligence Elsewhere* (2013), 7.

⁸⁹³ Andrew, *The Secret World* (2018).

outputs, suggests frameworks for understanding how knowledge can be effectively shared between these domains. As such, their work challenges traditional assumptions about the relationship – or divide – between academic and intelligence institutions. Their success in developing mechanisms for knowledge sharing, particularly evident in their intelligence reporting, shows how different institutional approaches may complement each other. Their experience also suggests frameworks for institutional cooperation that certainly can enhance both academic understanding and intelligence operations, while maintaining appropriate boundaries between these spheres.

The numerous Arab Bureau innovations highlighted in this study suggest important directions for possible future research to continue bridging Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, while their success in developing comprehensive approaches to regional analysis demonstrates the potential value of continued interdisciplinary research. As such, the Arab Bureau's experience suggests several key areas for future investigation, including the relationship between cultural knowledge and intelligence effectiveness, the role of academic expertise in intelligence operations, and frameworks for integrating different approaches to regional understanding.

The Arab Bureau's work demonstrates the value of theoretical frameworks that integrate insights from both Intelligence, Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, and their approach to regional analysis suggests obvious theoretical possibilities for combining insights from both fields. Their success in developing comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics demonstrates the potential value of integrated theoretical approaches, while their experience also stands to challenge theoretical divisions between academic and intelligence approaches to understanding regions.

The integration of different theoretical perspectives, particularly evident in their analysis of regional politics, shows how insights from both fields can enhance theoretical understanding, and which theoretical integration can only benefit both academic study and intelligence operations. The Arab Bureau's approaches also offer useful insights regarding practical applications of combined academic and intelligence expertise, and their experience offers valuable lessons for contemporary efforts to combine both approaches in practical operations. Their successful development of effective methods for integrating different forms of expertise provides a framework for practical application that remains relevant.

The Arab Bureau's approach to intelligence gathering and analysis offers particularly relevant insights for contemporary intelligence challenges, with their success in developing what has been identified as "culturally integrated intelligence frameworks"⁸⁹⁴ is a valuable model for modern intelligence organisations facing similar challenges of cultural complexity. The relevance of this is especially evident in what Davies describes as the persistent challenge of balancing cultural expertise with operational requirements.⁸⁹⁵

Their approach to what can be termed "operational cultural intelligence"⁸⁹⁶ demonstrates enduring principles for effective intelligence operations in culturally complex environments, while their experience with what Aldrich identifies as the "cultural-operational integration challenge"⁸⁹⁷ offers valuable lessons for modern intelligence organisations struggling to maintain sophisticated cultural intelligence capabilities while meeting immediate operational needs. This also continues to resonate with what has been described as the fundamental

⁸⁹⁴ Marrin, 'Improving Intelligence Studies' (2016), 272.

⁸⁹⁵ Davies, *Intelligence and Government* (2012), 147.

⁸⁹⁶ Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence* (2007), 156.

⁸⁹⁷ Aldrich, 'Strategic culture as a constraint' (2017), 630.

challenge of modern intelligence operations, namely, maintaining deep cultural understanding while delivering actionable intelligence.⁸⁹⁸

The Arab Bureau's long-term significance can be measured not only through direct institutional influence but through the repeated independent rediscovery of their methods across different historical periods. This pattern – conscious revival during the Second World War, unconscious replication in Cold War operations, and systematic redevelopment in contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine – provides compelling evidence that their approaches addressed enduring rather than transient intelligence challenges.⁸⁹⁹

Interwar Transmission (1920-1930s): Direct continuity through personnel transfers, particularly evident in Iraq administration under Percy Cox and subsequent colonial intelligence operations in Palestine and Transjordan.⁹⁰⁰

Wartime Revival (1940-1945): Conscious rediscovery by Political Warfare Executive and Special Operations Executive officers who explicitly studied Arab Bureau methods, particularly their integration of cultural analysis with propaganda production.⁹⁰¹

Cold War Echoes (1950s-1980s): Unconscious replication in Information Research Department operations and academic-intelligence partnerships, especially in approaches to regional analysis and cultural communication.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁸ Andrew, *The Secret World* (2018), 542.

⁸⁹⁹ On patterns of institutional learning in intelligence, see Sims, "Foreign Intelligence Liaison", in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* (2006): 19, no.2; 195-217.

⁹⁰⁰ CO 733/156, High Commissioner Palestine to Colonial Office, various correspondence 1925-1928 regarding tribal intelligence methods; CO 831/12, similar correspondence from Transjordan.

⁹⁰¹ FO 898/399, PWE Middle East files, 1942-1944; HS 3/147, SOE Cairo correspondence with London regarding Arab Bureau precedents.

⁹⁰² FCO 95/1847, IRD Middle East operations files, 1955-1965; see also Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War* (1998), 156-189.

Contemporary Convergence (2000s-present): Independent development of similar methods in counterinsurgency doctrine, validating the fundamental nature of Arab Bureau innovations without conscious historical reference.⁹⁰³

This trajectory clearly demonstrates that the Arab Bureau's significance lies not merely in their immediate wartime impact but in their anticipation of enduring requirements for cultural intelligence in complex operational environments. The pattern of convergent evolution across different historical periods confirms that they addressed fundamental rather than circumstantial challenges in intelligence work.

In concluding this chapter, it is clear that the Arab Bureau's impact and legacy present a complex picture of innovation, influence, and institutional change in both intelligence practices and regional engagement. Through detailed examination of their immediate impact, long-term legacy, and theoretical implications, this study has demonstrated the Arab Bureau's significance in shaping both intelligence practices and understanding of the Middle East.

The Arab Bureau's immediate effectiveness in intelligence reporting and propaganda operations, examined in detail through analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* and works like *Thawrat al-Arab*, demonstrated unprecedented sophistication in combining cultural knowledge with intelligence work. Their success in developing new approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis, while operating within traditional military structures, provided important lessons regarding innovation in intelligence organisations.

⁹⁰³ For analysis without reference to Arab Bureau precedents, see Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (2009), 267-299.

The long-term legacy of the Arab Bureau's work presents a more complex picture. While Andrew is right to argue that many lessons learned were in fact regrettably forgotten,⁹⁰⁴ this study has demonstrated a more nuanced pattern of influence. Rather than a simple narrative of forgotten lessons, we see periods of rediscovery, implicit influence, and sectoral variation in how Arab Bureau methods were remembered and applied. This analysis reconciles Andrew's observation with evidence of the Arab Bureau's long-term impact, while also providing original insights into the complex ways in which intelligence practices evolve and persist over time.

The theoretical implications of the Arab Bureau's work extend across multiple dimensions of both Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, and their innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and analysis suggest the need for theoretical frameworks that can accommodate the complex interplay between cultural understanding, operational effectiveness, and strategic planning. Their careful integration of diverse expertise and methods demonstrates theoretical possibilities for understanding intelligence work as a multifaceted endeavour that combines multiple forms of knowledge and expertise.

The Arab Bureau's "sophisticated regional engagement frameworks"⁹⁰⁵ provide models for contemporary intelligence operations facing similar challenges of cultural complexity and political sensitivity, while their success in creating what have been called "balanced intelligence structures"⁹⁰⁶ demonstrates enduring principles for effective intelligence operations in similar circumstances. As alluded to above, these lessons remain particularly

⁹⁰⁴ Andrew (2018), 737.

⁹⁰⁵ Wagner, 'Intelligence and the Origins of the British Middle East' (2015), 725.

⁹⁰⁶ Hatlebrette, *The Problem of Secret Intelligence* (2021), 156.

relevant to the modern challenge of maintaining sophisticated cultural intelligence capabilities while meeting operational requirements.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁷ For instance Whitesmith, *Cognitive Bias* (2020), 145.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to offer a comprehensive reassessment of the Arab Bureau, the relatively short-lived, Cairo-based branch of British military intelligence established during the First World War. The central argument demonstrates that the Arab Bureau was significantly more innovative than previously understood, representing a paradigm shift in intelligence practices whose significance is validated by the repeated independent rediscovery of their methods across subsequent historical periods. Rather than merely adapting existing practices to wartime needs, they anticipated solutions to enduring challenges in cultural intelligence that would prove relevant from the interwar period through to contemporary operations.

The analysis of the *Arab Bulletin* in Chapter Four was particularly illuminating, revealing how this intelligence product exemplified the Arab Bureau's pioneering approaches to information management. By integrating diverse sources of intelligence – from field reports and intercepted communications to local informants and academic analysis – the *Arab Bulletin* demonstrated the Arab Bureau's ability to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics than had previously been possible in military intelligence work. Their sophisticated handling of tribal intelligence, for instance, showed an appreciation for complex local political structures that went well beyond conventional military reporting.

Alongside this innovative approach to intelligence analysis, the Arab Bureau also displayed groundbreaking capabilities in the realm of propaganda, as uncovered through the in-depth examination of *Thawrat al-Arab* in Chapter Five.⁹⁰⁸ This remarkable Arabic text, which this author deems *sui generis* among intelligence-related publications of the era, stands as a

⁹⁰⁸ Full translation of *Thawrat al-Arab (The Arab Revolt)* will be published by Hurst (UK) & OUP (USA), 2026.

testament to the Arab Bureau's sophisticated understanding of cross-cultural communication. By seamlessly integrating cultural and religious themes into their propaganda efforts, they were able to work with Arab notables in a synergistic relationship that resulted in materials that resonated deeply with local audiences in ways that more crude, direct approaches could not match.

The study's analysis of the Arab Bureau's broader range of Arabic-language propaganda materials, in Chapter Six, including newspapers, pamphlets, and leaflets, further advanced the argument around the organisation's innovative strategies. Rather than relying on a single propaganda voice, they created a nuanced network of complementary publications, each tailored to specific audience segments. This multifaceted approach, combined with careful attention to linguistic and cultural nuance, represented a significant departure from conventional propaganda efforts of the time.

Methodologically, this research drew upon a range of analytical techniques outlined in Chapter Two, including textual analysis, comparative methods, network analysis, and the application of modern intelligence studies frameworks. The introduction of the concept of an imperial epistemic community provided a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how the Arab Bureau operated within the complex cultural environment of the early twentieth century Middle East. This framework shed light on how the organisation bridged academic expertise and practical intelligence needs, creating a unique synthesis of knowledge production and dissemination that shaped British understanding of the region.

By bridging the traditionally distinct fields of Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, this research has revealed important new insights for both disciplines, discussed more fully in

Chapter Seven. For Intelligence Studies, the study demonstrates the significant value that cultural expertise can bring to intelligence operations, as exemplified by the Arab Bureau's integration of academic knowledge with military intelligence. For Middle East Studies, the analysis reveals sophisticated patterns of interaction between imperial intelligence activities and local political movements, adding nuance to traditional narratives about British engagement with Arab nationalism.

The scope of this study was necessarily bounded by several factors. Temporally, the focus was on the Arab Bureau's operational period from its establishment in 1916 to its dissolution in 1920. Geographically, the research concentrated on Arab Bureau activities in Egypt, Arabia, and the Levant. Operationally, the emphasis was on its intelligence reporting and propaganda efforts. These parameters allowed for deep analysis while acknowledging the broader context of British imperial intelligence operations in the region.

Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. While archival research revealed significant new material, gaps remain in the historical record due to wartime destruction of documents and the inherent secrecy surrounding intelligence work. The challenge of quantifying intelligence effectiveness, particularly in measuring the impact of propaganda, required careful interpretation of available evidence.

This study's analysis reveals a crucial pattern that extends beyond the Arab Bureau's immediate wartime contributions. The trajectory from their wartime innovations through interwar transmission, Second World War revival, Cold War echoes, and contemporary rediscovery illuminates how intelligence organisations develop solutions to fundamental challenges that transcend specific historical contexts. Percy Cox's systematic application of Arab Bureau

methods in Iraq, the Political Warfare Executive's conscious revival of their propaganda techniques, and the independent development of similar approaches in modern counterinsurgency doctrine represent not isolated parallels but evidence of enduring requirements for cultural intelligence in complex operational environments.

This pattern validates the thesis' central argument while revealing broader insights about innovation in intelligence organisations. The Arab Bureau's experience demonstrates that truly innovative approaches address fundamental rather than circumstantial challenges, establishing methodological frameworks that prove adaptable across different historical periods and operational contexts.

This reassessment of the Arab Bureau makes several original contributions to scholarship. First, by moving to bridge Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies, this study has demonstrated how these fields can mutually inform each other, as exemplified by the previously unexamined case of *Thawrat al-Arab*. Second, this research transforms our understanding of First World War intelligence operations in the Middle East, revealing sophisticated approaches to cultural engagement that went far beyond contemporary practice. Third, the study offers new insights into the long-term impact of intelligence activities on British-Middle Eastern relations.

The patterns of innovation and rediscovery identified in this study suggest several promising directions for future research that could further illuminate the relationship between intelligence practices and historical development. The Arab Bureau's experience points to broader questions about how intelligence organisations innovate under pressure, maintain institutional knowledge across periods of change, and develop solutions to enduring operational challenges.

Historical Investigation: Comparative studies examining how other intelligence organisations – both British and foreign – developed similar approaches to cultural intelligence during different historical periods could provide valuable context for understanding whether the Arab Bureau’s innovations represented unique developments or part of broader patterns in intelligence evolution.

Institutional Analysis: Deeper exploration of how intelligence agencies maintain and transmit specialised knowledge over time, particularly during periods of organisational change, could yield important insights about why innovative practices like those developed by the Arab Bureau are sometimes forgotten and later rediscovered rather than systematically preserved.

Theoretical Development: The concept of an imperial epistemic community developed in this study could be productively applied to analyse other instances where intelligence organisations served as knowledge-producing institutions, potentially revealing broader patterns in the relationship between intelligence work and colonial understanding.

Examining how intelligence practices have continued to shape and be shaped by the shifting landscape of the modern Middle East remains a rich area for investigation. Scholars may also find value in applying the imperial epistemic community framework developed in this study to analyse the role of intelligence in other colonial or post-colonial contexts. The long-term impact of intelligence operations on regional political development remains a rich area for investigation, especially regarding the complex interplay between intelligence activities and evolving political structures. Tracing the long-term legacy and influence of innovative

intelligence approaches like those pioneered by the Arab Bureau could yield important lessons for contemporary organisations seeking to navigate complex global challenges.

The historical significance of the Arab Bureau's innovations is validated by their repeated rediscovery across different eras. The emergence of similar approaches in contemporary intelligence doctrine – developed independently of historical knowledge of Arab Bureau practices – provides compelling retrospective evidence of their fundamental importance. When modern intelligence theorists identified the need for “cultural intelligence” and systematic integration of academic expertise with operational requirements, they were unknowingly validating principles the Arab Bureau had systematically developed a century earlier.

This pattern of convergent evolution demonstrates that the Arab Bureau addressed enduring rather than transient challenges in intelligence work. Their sophisticated integration of cultural expertise with intelligence requirements, exemplified by the *Arab Bulletin's* comprehensive regional analysis, anticipated modern understandings of the essential role contextual knowledge plays in effective operations. The fact that contemporary agencies facing similar challenges of operating in unfamiliar cultural environments have independently developed comparable methods confirms the Arab Bureau's innovative character while illustrating the persistent nature of cultural intelligence requirements in complex operational environments.

Scholars would benefit from investigating the relationship between cultural knowledge and intelligence effectiveness, particularly examining how deep regional expertise impacts operational outcomes. Additionally, research examining how intelligence organisations adapt and innovate in response to changing circumstances should yield valuable insights for contemporary practice. Further study is also needed on how intelligence organisations maintain

and transmit institutional knowledge across generations of officers and analysts, particularly during periods of organisational change. Also, investigating the role of intelligence in shaping regional understanding and policy formation may well provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between intelligence gathering and policy development.

The Arab Bureau's experience exemplifies what has been identified as the fundamental challenge of integrating cultural knowledge with operational intelligence requirements.⁹⁰⁹ Their sophisticated approach to cultural intelligence demonstrates what has been termed "structured cultural integration,"⁹¹⁰ establishing methodological frameworks that remain relevant to contemporary intelligence operations. Added to this, as Aldrich argues, intelligence organisations continue to navigate similar challenges of balancing cultural expertise with operational effectiveness,⁹¹¹ which makes the Arab Bureau's innovations particularly pertinent to modern intelligence practices.

Further, the Arab Bureau's success in developing "integrated analytical frameworks"⁹¹² offers valuable insights for contemporary intelligence operations facing similar challenges of cultural complexity, while their innovative approaches to what has been called "cultural-operational synthesis"⁹¹³ provides a model for modern intelligence organisations struggling to integrate regional expertise with operational requirements. As Western intelligence agencies continue to grapple with the challenges of gathering accurate, timely, and actionable intelligence in rapidly changing regions, the Arab Bureau's experiences provide a compelling case study in adapting to such circumstances.

⁹⁰⁹ Hatlebrette, *The Problem of Secret Intelligence* (2021), 156.

⁹¹⁰ Whitesmith, *Cognitive Bias* (2020), 145.

⁹¹¹ Aldrich, 'Strategic culture' (2017), 630.

⁹¹² Marrin, 'Improving Intelligence Studies' (2016), 270.

⁹¹³ Davies and Gustafson, *Intelligence Elsewhere* (2013), 7.

A prime example is the Arab Bureau's sophisticated integration of cultural expertise with intelligence requirements, as exemplified by the *Arab Bulletin's* comprehensive regional analysis. This approach anticipated modern understandings of "cultural intelligence", which is the recognition that deep contextual knowledge is essential for effective operations in foreign settings. The Arab Bureau's ability to combine academic area studies insights with military information demonstrated innovative possibilities for enhancing situational awareness and informing strategic decision-making. Contemporary agencies facing similar challenges of operating in unfamiliar cultural milieus would be well-served to emulate this blending of scholarly expertise and practical intelligence work.

The Arab Bureau's experience also offers lessons regarding the organisational adaptability required for innovation in intelligence. Their flexible, interdisciplinary structure, which brought together military personnel, academics, and regional specialists, represented a marked departure from traditional hierarchical models. This nimble, collaborative approach allowed the Arab Bureau to develop novel methods for intelligence gathering and analysis. In contrast, many modern intelligence organisations continue to struggle with institutional resistance to unconventional practices, unable to replicate the Arab Bureau's capacity for combining diverse knowledge and skills. Studying how the Arab Bureau navigated this balance between innovation and tradition provides a roadmap for contemporary agencies seeking to foster a culture of creativity.

The Arab Bureau's sophisticated use of propaganda and information operations is another area with clear contemporary relevance. Their nuanced, culturally-embedded approach to crafting persuasive materials for local audiences stands in stark contrast to the more heavy-handed

tactics that have sometimes characterised recent Western information warfare efforts in the Middle East. The Arab Bureau's ability to leverage existing social and intellectual networks, while maintaining plausible deniability, offers insights into developing influence campaigns that resonate authentically rather than appear as transparent propaganda. As modern militaries and intelligence services seek to refine their strategic communication capabilities, the Arab Bureau's experience provides a model for how to navigate the complex interplay between intelligence, cultural knowledge, and information dissemination.

In conclusion, this reassessment of the Arab Bureau reveals an organisation whose significance extends far beyond its immediate wartime context to illuminate enduring patterns in intelligence innovation and regional engagement. The Arab Bureau's sophisticated approaches to combining cultural knowledge with intelligence work, while not always fully appreciated or systematically maintained, established methodological frameworks that have proven adaptable across multiple historical periods. The pattern of their repeated rediscovery – from conscious revival during the Second World War to independent redevelopment in contemporary operations – validates their innovative character while demonstrating that they addressed fundamental rather than transient challenges in intelligence work.

This study's bridging of Intelligence Studies and Middle East Studies has revealed how these fields can mutually illuminate each other, while the analysis of previously unexamined materials like *Thawrat al-Arab* demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding complex historical phenomena. The Arab Bureau's experience offers important insights not only about intelligence practices but about the broader processes through which external actors engage with and influence regional political developments.

Ultimately, the Arab Bureau's innovations highlight enduring principles that transcend their specific historical context: the value of deep cultural understanding in intelligence operations, the importance of organisational adaptability for effective innovation, and the power of culturally-informed communication in complex political environments. While their specific methods required adaptation for different historical contexts, the fundamental insights of their experience, validated through repeated rediscovery, continue to illuminate both the possibilities and challenges of intelligence work in culturally complex environments. The Arab Bureau's legacy thus lies not merely in their immediate wartime contributions but in their anticipation of enduring requirements for sophisticated cultural intelligence that would prove relevant across multiple historical periods and operational contexts.

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