

Leadership in Counterinsurgency: A Tale of Two Leaders

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This man is different from the rest of the Englishmen whom we have seen so far, [in] that he listens attentively to the political organization of the Arabs and his questions show a depth in the subject, which is not present except with one who has in it a pleasure and a passion.

—Dr. Sahbander on meeting T.E. Lawrence.¹

The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people.

—General Sir Gerald Templer, Malaya, 1952.²

THE IMPORTANCE OF military leadership remains constant in peacetime, war, or a counterinsurgency operation. To develop better leaders for the current counterinsurgency fight, let us look back at two highly successful leaders of the past. T.E. Lawrence, always a controversial figure, lived the life of an insurgent when he was posted as an advisor to the Arab forces fighting the Turkish Army during the Arab revolt of 1916-1918. General Sir Gerald Templer possessed the ideal leadership qualities necessary to defeat an insurgency and thus was able to shift the balance of power in favor of the British during the Malaya Emergency. Although both were great leaders, the two figures could not be more opposite. Lawrence was the eccentric misfit and Templer the essence of a proper British officer. Both, however, possessed a timeless trait our current leaders need in order to win in a counterinsurgency environment—bold leadership. We can evaluate the quality of the leadership these two officers had using the Army framework of “Be, Know, Do” found in FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*.

FM 22-100 describes the key characteristics needed by a U.S. Army leader as “Be, Know, and Do.” “Be” represents the leader’s character or inner strength. Character, demonstrated through behavior, helps build the moral courage to make difficult decisions.³ “Know” involves interpersonal, conceptual, technical, and tactical skills. A leader masters all of these skills to build a team, transform a unit’s weaknesses, and enhance a unit’s strengths. The “do” of leadership characteristics includes influencing people, operating the systems of an organization, and improving an organization’s capabilities.⁴ Both T.E. Lawrence and General Templer possessed the necessary qualities of “Be, Know, and Do” to be successful when they assumed leadership roles as insurgent and counterinsurgent leaders.

T.E. Lawrence

The name T.E. Lawrence stirs up a variety of emotions today. His seminal work, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, brought him into a spotlight from

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PHOTO on the right: Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, portrait in service dress. (Courtesy of the Council of the National Army Museum, London)

Lawrence was the eccentric misfit and Templer the essence of a proper British officer.

which he struggled to escape later in life. In *Pillars*, he paints a vivid picture of desert warfare, describes life with the Arab tribes, and writes about his role as an insurgent advisor. He discusses the troubles, motivations, and strengths of an Arab insurgency, as well as the challenges he faced as military advisor. Counterinsurgency students can gain valuable insights by looking at his leadership actions during the time he served as an advisor in the desert.

Lawrence developed a passion for archeology while he was in college; thus he chose to spend years doing research on crusader fortifications throughout the Middle East in the early 1900s.⁵ He had a love for the desert and wanted to blend in with the Arab people; he would often spend weeks alone walking from region to region dressed as an Arab while absorbing their culture. His understanding of the culture, ability to speak Arabic, and knowledge of the terrain eventually won him a commission as an intelligence officer in Cairo when World War I started.

Lawrence had some limited military training while in college, but little other formal officer training.⁶ Even so, he read and understood military theorists, both classic and those of his time. Lawrence often quoted Clausewitz and Joffre in his writings, along with Thucydides and other ancient writers. Yet he was somewhat of a misfit in uniform. His odd behaviors, lack of military discipline, and fondness for Arab culture frustrated his superiors, so they assigned him as a liaison officer to the Arab revolt primarily to get him out of the headquarters and to harness his understanding of Arab culture, which other British officers only vaguely understood.

Lawrence's lack of extensive officer training proved a benefit in the desert. He held neither the presumptions nor the fondness for formal procedures that most British officers held. As a result, he used his own knowledge of Arab culture, which he had learned about not through books or classes, but through experience.

Lawrence's mission for the British Army was to assess the Arabs' capabilities and the chances

of the revolt's success. When he met with Prince Faisal in the Arabian Desert, Lawrence quickly took in the situation of the Arab revolt and rendered his assessment to the British military. Lawrence, however, had the courage to go a few steps further. He returned to Prince Faisal's camp and became, in essence, an insurgent.⁷ By living and working with the Arab fighters, Lawrence gained a better understanding of their capabilities.

Lawrence found that the Arab fighters had no unified effort and no clear identity as Arabs; their alliance was first to their kin and tribe. He planned to build alliances between tribes to unify the insurgents and focus their efforts.

The Arab fighters had no modern rifles, machine guns, or artillery. But at the same time, they were highly mobile, as they were not encumbered with heavy equipment. Therefore, Lawrence exploited the Arab's mobility. The fighters' camel-riding skills and heartiness allowed them to conduct hit-and-run raids wherever they desired, limited only by the amount of flour they could carry and the location of watering holes.

In contrast to the Arabs, the Turks lived in fixed fortifications (such as Medina) and established bases supplied by tenuous lines of communication. For supply, they relied almost entirely on railroads across the vast, open desert. Armed with this information, Lawrence planned to harass the Turkish supply lines and leave the larger fixed forces to wither away in their bases. (Medina alone held over 12,000 Turkish troops.)⁸ He advised the Arabs to use insurgency tactics and avoid conventional battles. Lawrence continued to develop his technical and tactical skills to lead his insurgents. His successes resulted in more tribes joining his cause.

Lawrence eventually devised a daring plan to seize the port city of Aqaba with the Arab fighters. Aqaba offered a port to supply the Arabs, along with a fast method to communicate with the British military. Furthermore, he envisioned Aqaba as a stepping-stone for the Arabs' eventual drive to Damascus. Lawrence also wanted modern weapons, logistical support, and especially money, to sustain the insurgency. The port provided that logistical link to the British military so necessary to continue the revolt. However, Aqaba was well protected from any sea assault by strong coastal defenses. These

defenses prevented any British naval or amphibious reinforcements for the Arab fighters if they assaulted Aqaba. Nonetheless, Lawrence led a bold march over 600 miles of open desert, capturing Aqaba from the lightly defended east with a small party of Arab insurgents and stunning the British military command in Cairo.⁹

Day after day, Lawrence demonstrated his personal courage while leading the insurgents. He had received technical training from the Royal Navy on demolitions and became an accomplished train bomber, planting explosives along railroad tracks while his insurgent force waited in ambush. Lawrence and his insurgents wrecked dozens of Turkish supply trains, severely hampering the logistical situation at the fixed bases. He understood the Arab insurgents' strengths, saying: "We could develop a highly mobile, highly equipped striking force of the smallest size, and use it successively at distributed points of the Turkish line, to make them strengthen their posts beyond the defensive minimum of twenty men. This would be a short cut to success."¹⁰

As an insurgent leader, Lawrence seemed to live by the current U.S. Army leadership model of "Be, Know, and Do." His interpersonal skills appeared sharper when among the Arabs. He understood the capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses of the Arab insurgent organization and continually organized (and reorganized) tenuous alliances between tribes to maintain a delicate balance within the Arab coalition and thus keep the insurgency active. He used his British military links to improve the quality of equipment and logistical support for his insurgents.

Although Lawrence is often maligned by historians, there is little doubt that he demonstrated effective leadership in the Arab revolt and contributed to the British victory over the Turkish Army. During World War II, the British Army issued copies of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to resistance commanders as a textbook on irregular warfare.¹¹ Still considered by many as the perfect example of what a military advisor should be, Lawrence was instrumental in the success of the Arab revolt.

Sir Gerald Templer

In June 1948, the Malayan Communist Party initiated an insurgency against the British and Malayan

government that produced the Malaya Emergency. The insurgents were primarily ethnic Chinese looking to conduct a Maoist revolution to bring about a Communist-run state. The situation in Malaya, however, was different from that in China when Mao revolted. The British had occupied Malaya since 1791, and the majority of Malaysians had no appetite for Communism. Most of Malaya's income came from British-run rubber plantations and tin mines. Only Malaya's minority ethnic-Chinese population had a desire for Communism. However, through 1951, the British had little success in stemming the Communist insurgency.

In February 1952, Templer arrived in Malaya as the new high commissioner. The year 1951 had been the most violent year in the insurgency. In fact, the security was so poor that on 6 October 1951, former High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney was killed in a Communist ambush.¹² Templer faced an extremely difficult situation. There was a complete lack of cultural understanding within the Malayan security forces and the British Army.

A former commander of the 56th and 6th Armored Divisions during World War II, Templer had had the traditional military assignments. However, he had also served as the military governor of the British zone in occupied Germany after the war, which equipped him with a working knowledge of military governance. Once on the ground in Malaya, Templer wasted little time getting to work. He took a three-week tour of the country to gauge the situation. Based on his findings, he reorganized his headquarters to better address the insurgency.

He refocused his staff from warfighting to civil relief, social changes, economic stability, and small-unit operations. Templer concentrated on securing the police posts around the country and on capturing or turning, not killing, insurgents. Templer convinced the surrendered insurgents who worked for him to give statements to the media and distribute propaganda reports to encourage their former comrades to surrender. Psychological warfare sections, consisting of no more than 30 mostly Chinese ex-insurgents, known as psywar groups, broadcast surrender policies. Rather than kill insurgents, Templer chose a well-executed surrender policy that provided the best possible intelligence on the organization, morale, and weaknesses of the insurgency.¹³ Radio broadcasts,

Chinese-language newspapers, government films, pamphlets, and personal appearances by surrendered enemy personnel in villages all aided the British counterinsurgency campaign.

Templer also made important changes to the military effort. Patrol reports became mandatory. An operational research team went through all the raw data gathered from the reports, analyzed it, and distributed lessons learned back to the troops in the field. Rather than continue the fruitless battalion-sized jungle sweeps conducted for the first three years of the insurgency, Templer emphasized deep jungle patrolling by small, well-trained units to gather vital intelligence on the insurgents. Jungle training schools taught army and police units small-unit tactics and effective methods for fighting insurgents. Doctrine also developed rapidly. Based on lessons learned at the jungle training school, a small book known as *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya* was printed. The book was small enough to fit in the pockets of a soldier's jungle uniform. Every six months, soldiers received an updated and revised edition containing the latest intelligence and lessons learned.¹⁴ The Malayan police forces also received this valuable document, and they attended the same army schools as British soldiers to develop proficiency in fighting an insurgent force. Templer knew that integrating his security forces was an important step toward a stable future for Malaya.

Templer wisely focused on winning over the insurgents' support base, Malaya's ethnic-Chinese civilians. Public works projects and civic training in the ethnic-Chinese areas prepared local leaders to eventually take over an independent Malayan government. These projects provided huge incentives to either turn away from or turn in the insurgents. Templer accelerated the relocation (first implemented under the Briggs Plan) of entire Chinese squatter villages.¹⁵ The British built brand new towns complete with schools and medical facilities and designated plots of land for the Chinese squatters. Villages located on the fringes of the jungles eventually relocated to these new

camps under British protection and control. A city government run by the ethnic Chinese within the villages prepared the population for an eventual merger into mainstream Malayan society. In addition, each family received a land title for their farmland. This was the first time a majority of ethnic Chinese had hereditary titles passable from father to son guaranteeing family land ownership. The new villages took away the vital insurgent support base and started to integrate ethnic Chinese into mainstream Malayan society, breaking down cultural walls.

Templer understood the cultural problems that caused the insurgency in Malaya. Knowing the situation, he was able to institute effective methods to win back the population. Templer's ability to influence, improve, and lead others in an organization—the “do” aspect of leadership—is what sets him apart as a counterinsurgent leader. Despite his career of traditional military assignments, Templer quickly grasped that the key to defeating the Malayan insurgency was not military action, but winning over the Chinese population through social changes and improved security. Templer understood the problems facing his organization from the first day he took command. Every one of his efforts focused on improving his organization's ability to understand the insurgent problem, finding solutions to the problem, and working toward applying those solutions. Templer not only possessed a military officer's technical and tactical skills, he was a military government expert as well. His ability to take traditional military organizational skills and apply them toward defeating an insurgency demonstrated his organizational leadership abilities. Lessons from Templer's military governance clearly could have helped U.S. military commanders at the end of hostilities during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Again, military commanders shed their traditional roles as warriors and took on the work of governance. In our current counterinsurgent fight, U.S. senior leaders continue to use techniques similar to those General Templer used successfully. The actions of General Petraeus in Mosul are a classic example

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of a military leader focusing on social, economic, and cultural lines of operation as well as traditional military operations.

Leadership remains the most important factor in the success of any military operation, be it conventional combat or a counterinsurgency campaign. The traditional education, training, and planning abilities of military officers provide a firm foundation for building counterinsurgency skills. A leader's responsibility to "Be, Know, and Do," however, never changes, regardless of the environment.

Both T.E. Lawrence and General Templer demonstrated different, yet important, types of leadership in two completely different insurgent environments. Lawrence successfully integrated himself within an Arab insurgency and helped transform a scattered band of tribes into a formidable force. Templer took over a difficult command as the

British leader of Malaya and wrested control of the country from the insurgents by winning over the population's hearts and minds. Both soldiers demonstrated the absolute need for strong leadership, regardless of the situation. **MR**

NOTES

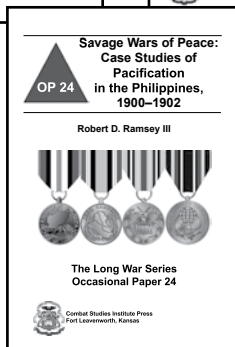
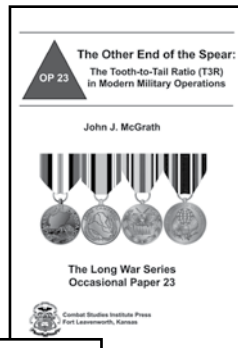
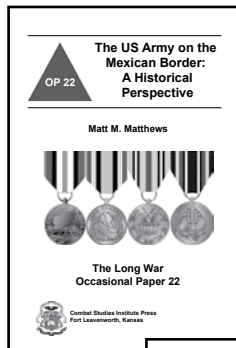
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