

Full citation:

J.E. Peterson. *Defending Arabia*, Chapter 3: Postwar Policy: British Retreat and Imperial Vestiges. Online edition from www.JEPeterson.net (posted September 2000)

Originally published as:

J.E. Peterson. *Defending Arabia*. London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.

N.B. The text in this online edition has not been updated from the originally published version.

CHAPTER 3: POSTWAR POLICY: BRITISH RETREAT AND IMPERIAL VESTIGES

Britain's continued military presence East-of-Suez for nearly a quarter century beyond World War II in many ways seems to run against the prevailing economic and political logic of Britain's reduced circumstances after the war. While the loss of India logically should have dictated a rundown of the defense establishment in the Indian Ocean in short order, instead the prewar apparatus was resurrected and the region came to be one of the last principal areas where British defense capabilities were extended out of the North Atlantic/European theatre.¹

There were a number of compelling arguments for retrenchment from overseas obligations, including those East-of-Suez. Perhaps the most permanent of these was Britain's economic difficulties, particularly acute after the war but more-or-less continuing up to the present. In his *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, Paul M. Kennedy clearly demonstrates the economic underpinnings of the decline of the once-invincible British navy to less than a "good second-class navy." His observations are directed at the navy but they are just as applicable to the entire nexus of the British defense dilemma:

For maritime strength depends, as it always did, upon commercial and industrial strength: if the latter is declining relatively, the former is bound to follow. As Britain's naval rise was rooted in its economic advancement, so too its naval collapse is rooted in its steady loss of economic primacy. We have come full circle.²

¹The unfolding of British strategic policy regarding the East-of-Suez theatre has been covered in Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1973); C.J. Bartlett, *The Long Retreat: A Short History of British Defence Policy, 1945-70* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972); L.W. Martin, *British Defence Policy: The Long Recessional* (London: Institute for Strategic Studies, November 1969; Adelphi Papers, No. 61); and Jacob A badi, *Britain's Withdrawal From the Middle East, 1947-1971: The Economic and Strategic Imperatives* (Princeton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1982). Also relevant for the early period is William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). The 1968 decision to quit the Gulf is discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.

²*The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976; paperback ed., London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 337.

Concomitantly, as Britain's GNP fell behind that of its wartime adversaries, its defense spending declined steadily in proportion to social expenditures while the cost of military equipment skyrocketed. Nevertheless, for reasons explained below, the costs of an East-of-Suez presence were never thoroughly debated until severe economic straits in the 1960s finally meant that it could not be avoided.

A second argument for retrenchment was a shift in strategic emphasis following the war. Closer bonds to Western Europe were perceived as necessary and were steadily growing, while the emerging Soviet threat seemed to be poised first at Europe. The Common Market and NATO membership served to reinforce the European emphasis. At the same time, there was widespread belief that any war in which Britain would be involved was likely to be total war and quite possibly nuclear. The latter prospect radically changed the security equation, tending to refocus security attention on Europe and the British homeland. The introduction of the nuclear factor into the East-West confrontation initiated a continuing debate on the proper defense posture. On the one hand, there was the necessity of developing a nuclear deterrent to defend what had become an extremely small and vulnerable island. At the same time, however, there was also the need to maintain conventional forces capable of intervening anywhere in the world where an Eastern bloc threat appeared.

Over the next four decades, the involvement of British forces in such widespread contingencies as Palestine, Korea, Malaya, Kenya, Suez, Oman, Kuwait, Cyprus, Aden, North Borneo, Mauritius, Belize, Anguilla, and the Falklands argued persuasively for the continuation of global conventional capabilities, despite economic stringencies. In addition, for reasons of pride and inter-service competition, the continued determination to play a global, as well as a European, role provided a counterweight to the strategic de-emphasis of overseas defense commitments. This was particularly true for the navy, which had seen itself in a more imperial and global role than the other services before the war. Afterwards, it never developed an ability to argue for a navy suited to a conflict with the Soviets and consequently stressed a global police role as its *raison d'être*.³ Revision of the strategic thinking on the role of warfare outside the resort to nuclear weapons, boosted greatly by the experience of a conventional war in Korea, contributed to this.

A third argument came to the fore early with Indian independence in 1947. The principal rationale for an imperial defense apparatus and an Indian Ocean presence disappeared. As Lord Curzon had observed years before,

When India has gone and the great Colonies have gone, do you suppose that we can stop there? Your ports and coaling stations, your fortresses and dockyards, your Crown Colonies and protectorates will go too. For either they will be unnecessary as the toll-gates and barbicans of an empire that has vanished, or they will be taken by an enemy more powerful than yourselves.⁴

The remaining British strongholds in the region had been acquired and then the effort made to defend them because of their strategic importance to India. The removal of India from the equation required a shift in security emphasis from defending India to fulfilling obligations to remaining colonial

³See Kennedy, *British Naval Mastery*.

⁴From Lord Curzon's presidential address to the Birmingham and Midland Institute, 1907, cited in Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 1.

possessions, superseded by post-independence obligations. These commitments were costly, since Britain no longer received the income from the empire to cover the expenses of defending large parts of the globe.⁵ Furthermore, the loss of India meant conscription was introduced in Britain to cover the loss of Indian Army manpower and a new network of bases had to be found in the Middle East – even though these proved to be only temporary.

The principal reason for the continuing presence East-of-Suez, however, seemed to be inertia, a habit of thinking in terms of imperial and global responsibilities. Rather than relating defense arrangements to the process of decolonization and scaling down, planning went forward on the basis that the British presence in the region naturally would be permanent. As Phillip Darby notes,

"Thus the defence system originally designed to safeguard the Indian empire was maintained throughout the fifties to secure what were thought to be Britain's interests and responsibilities in the Middle East, the Far East, and in Africa. And in the early sixties, when Britain's colonial empire had gone the way of the Indian empire, it was refashioned, and in some ways strengthened, to meet the requirements of the post-imperial order."⁶

In addition, three specific factors encouraging a continuing presence may be cited: (1) the difficulty of considering withdrawal when British forces were almost continually engaged in East-of-Suez contingencies; (2) the commitment of the three services to a world role, partly because of their imperial tradition and partly because of inter-service politics in an era of declining defense expenditures; and (3) the inability of British governments during this era to consider long-term implications of commitment in this region and make decisions accordingly.⁷ The consequence was a continuing tension between the inevitable conclusion that Britain must leave and the compelling reasons to stay. The unsteady balance between these opposing forces and their respective proponents was periodically adjusted by crises of a political nature in London or of a military nature in the region.

AIR OPERATIONS IN ADEN PROTECTORATE

Aden quintessentially fit the description of one of those British strongholds originally acquired to protect the approaches and lines of communications to India. Yet Aden's importance remained and even increased after India's independence, particularly as the search intensified for new and replacement military bases in the Middle East and a suitable location from which to command the forces in the region. The consolidation of Britain's regional military forces in Aden at the end of the 1950s was short-lived, however, as financial stringencies at home and a guerrilla campaign in South Arabia combined to force evacuation from Aden in late 1967.

⁵On the other hand, the need to protect investments (reckoned in the 1960s to include £700 million-£800 million in Malaysia and Singapore and £1 billion-£2 billion in the Gulf) and trade (almost half of total British trade took place in the East-of-Suez area) was cited as a necessary reason for continuing the British military presence East-of-Suez. Martin, *British Defence Policy*, p. 5.

⁶*British Defence Policy*, p. 327.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 331.

In the years before the Suez debacle, British commitment in the Indian Ocean was a given assumption and not subjected to close analysis. Although it was undeniable that its overseas role had changed, the British military presence East of Suez was simply accepted and unquestioned. Three implicit considerations underpinned this presence. First, if Britain was in these places diplomatically, then it was felt that it had to be there militarily, despite the diminishing utility of military power to support diplomatic goals. Second, Britain's economic requirements made it seem logical that there should be military capabilities in near-proximity to the Gulf's oil-producing areas. A third consideration involved Britain's security interests. Communist ambitions were seen to be not only of local importance but also affected the overall balance; thus in the Middle East, the potential Soviet threat seen in terms of a conventional move south toward the Red Sea and the Gulf.⁸

British effectiveness in the Indian Ocean in the early postwar era was hampered by the lack of coordination between the separate service commands in the region and the need to find new bases. The regional headquarters of the army and the air force, covering both the eastern Mediterranean and the western Indian Ocean, were located in the Canal Zone, although their areas of responsibility were not the same. The navy, however, was divided for obvious reasons between a Mediterranean command, based in Malta and the East Indies Station, based in Ceylon. The proposal in the late 1940s to consolidate regional operations in Kenya was opposed by the navy, as Mediterranean operations could not be controlled from there, and coolly received by the RAF. An interim regional headquarters was established in the Canal Zone in 1948, while plans called for its eventual relocation to Cyrenaica. The navy required the greatest adjustment, as the new Middle East command incorporated the Mediterranean Fleet, remaining in Malta (along with the C-in-C Middle East), and a truncated East Indies Station.⁹

The rise of nationalism in the Middle East meant that the withdrawal of the British military presence from such countries as Egypt and Iraq was inevitable. But there was no immediately satisfactory replacement for the extensive facilities in the Canal Zone. As Emmanuel Shinwell, the Secretary of State for War, expressed the problem in December 1949, "The Canal Zone of Egypt remains our main base in the Middle East. There is no other suitable location for that base ... if we have to abandon Egypt we must abandon our status in the Middle East altogether."¹⁰ Cyprus was suitable for the air force but the army required a mainland location. Kenya was too far away,

⁸Ibid., pp. 59-60. This factor provided part of the reason for British participation in the Baghdad Pact.

⁹AIR/20/6610, COS (48) 59th Meeting, 28 Apr. 1948, and various other correspondence; AIR/20/6611; various correspondence. A new Far East Command was created for the navy with the dividing line at Sumatra. For practical reasons, the C-in-C Middle East was to remain at Malta while a liaison office was established at the new regional headquarters.

¹⁰Cited in Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, p. 17. Louis's description gives an idea of the size of the base: "The Suez enclave stretched not only from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea but also westwards three-quarters of the way to Cairo. ... The enclave's physical structure consisted of a network of roads, railways, harbours, ports, military garrisons, airfields, and a flying-boat station. There were ammunition dumps and extensive repair facilities that were irreplaceable. In short it was a vast arsenal. The region of hills and scrub in the south as well as the barren desert areas provided splendid grounds for manoeuvres and training. The canal from Cairo provided fresh water. ... Before 1947 Suez was the largest reservoir of British military strength outside India." Ibid., p. 9.

particularly from the RAF's point of view, and later troubled by the Mau Mau rebellion. Cyrenaica lacked adequate port, water, industrial and manpower facilities. Transjordan (later Jordan) was strongly resisted by all the services, although the RAF later utilized airfields at 'Amman and Mafrq. That left Palestine: the advantages of the mandate included the air base at Lydda, the naval installations at Haifa, and the oil pipeline terminus and refinery also at Haifa, as well as the convenient location close to the Suez Canal and in the center of the region. But Palestine also displayed insurmountable disadvantages. Arab-Jewish strife was emerging even before the war ended, and Jewish extremists blew up British military headquarters in Jerusalem's King David Hotel in 1946. Still, efforts to utilize Palestine ceased only with the announcement in 1947 that the Palestine Mandate would be abandoned.¹¹ As a consequence, Britain remained dependent on the Canal Zone base until Egyptian hostility after the 1952 revolution forced the decision to abandon it in 1954; withdrawal was completed early in 1956.¹²

Since developments in the Middle East, even before the Suez debacle, were fast depriving Britain of potential bases, new emphasis was placed on the concepts of strategic reserve and air mobility. Ideally, such a policy would permit substantial savings in manpower and basing costs and would reduce political entanglements. This approach seemed particularly suited to the Middle East because of the diminishing British position there and the historical preeminence of the RAF in the region. Nevertheless, this strategy still required a chain of military bases and airfields, for deploying bomber forces and air trooping, and involved a commitment in ground forces to defend the bases.

In addition, the loss of facilities in Palestine, Egypt and Iraq, and then worsening political relations with many Arab states after Suez served to create an air barrier to the movement of equipment and personnel between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Thus, the perception deepened that the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean constituted two separate theatres – and incidentally contributed to a coherence and integration in East-of-Suez strategic thinking, which finally could be divorced from other regional considerations. Aden, hitherto on the periphery of regional security arrangements, began to move to center stage in British military planning. Its strategic value had also been enhanced in 1951 when a large oil refinery was built in Aden to replace the huge complex at Abadan, under international boycott as a response to the Iranian government's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

The closure of the Suez Canal after the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion (temporarily) added a sea aspect to the Middle Eastern strategic barrier and thus accelerated the expansion of East-of-Suez capabilities in Aden. The RAF presence in Aden had been strengthened at the end of 1956 and further expansion occurred in 1957 and 1958, prompted in part by increased dissident activities in the Aden Protectorate and the rebellion in Oman. "In the space of three years between 1956 and

¹¹Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-71* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 156-158.

¹²Despite the political problems with Palestine/Israel, the overwhelming advantages of a base in the vicinity of the Canal had led British military planners as late as 1951 to conclude that the only practicable solution to the loss of Suez would be an interim base in Israel. DEFE/7/25, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, J.P. (50) 141(S) and J.A.P. (50) Final, "Location of Forces and Administrative Installations in the Middle East, Report by the Joint Planning and the Joint Administrative Planning Staff," 17 Jan. 1951.

1959, the strength of the RAF under the Commander, BFAP had grown from one fighter squadron at Khormaksar and a handful of communications aircraft divided between Aden, Nairobi and Bahrein, into a force of some nine squadrons."¹³ A unified command – British Forces, Arabian Peninsula (BFAP) – was established in Aden in April 1958 and was upgraded in 1959 to conform with the growing strategic importance of the Arabian Peninsula and western half of the Indian Ocean. For the first time, British forces in Aden reported directly to the Chiefs of Staff and not through the Mediterranean.¹⁴

The first decade following World War II had seen few changes in Aden. The Protectorate still slumbered in near-total isolation, in increasing contrast to the bustling, modernizing Colony. Neither the war nor the immediate postwar years had had any effect on the nature of Aden's local security problem. Security in the Protectorate depended as always on the RAF, with assistance on the ground provided by either the Aden Protectorate Levies or the Government Guards. Just as before the war, extensive reliance was placed on the utility of air control in enforcing government sanctions, keeping peace between the tribes, and countering incursions from the imamate in the north. The regularity of occasions on which the RAF was called to perform is shown in [Table 3.1](#).

However, both the effectiveness and the "humaneness" of air control was being called into question. The Middle East, as well as the North West Frontier, had long been the proving ground for the theory and practice of air control (as shown in the previous chapter) and its open terrain and peripatetic nature of tribal relations with the authorities made it an ideal environment for air policing. With Iraqi independence in the 1930s and Indian independence in 1947, however, Aden was left as one of the last places where the policy was applied routinely. Aden's isolation before the war, and the presumed exigencies of wartime conditions had precluded debate over the use of air policing in the Protectorate.¹⁵ After the war ended, however, the Colonial Office found itself repeatedly compelled to defend the practice.¹⁶ The RAF not only maintained that air control was still a viable

¹³David Lee, *Flight From the Middle East: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Territories, 1945-1972* (London: HMSO, 1980), p. 155.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 29-34. See also the descriptive surveys of BFAP's responsibilities by its former commander in M.L. Heath, "Arabian Extremities," *JRCAS*, Vol. 47, Pt. 3 and 4 (July-October 1960), pp. 260-269; and idem, "Stability in the Arabian Peninsula," *JRUSI*, Vol. 105, No. 618 (May 1960), pp. 174-185. The Aden command was renamed Middle East Command in 1961 while Cyprus became the Near East Command.

¹⁵RAF forces based in Aden were also used for operations against tribes in Somalia and Eritrea in the postwar period. Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶See, for example, AIR/2/10483, Trafford Smith (Colonial Office) to C.W. Baxter (Foreign Office), Feb. 1947: "The practice of punitive air action against recalcitrant tribes is, in the case of the Aden Protectorate, well established and understood by those against whom it is likely to be used. It is, of course, liable to uninformed criticism. Nevertheless, our feeling here is that in suitable circumstances punitive air action as hitherto carried out remains the method of maintaining order most effective and least costly in human life.... In actual fact, casualties, on such occasions, are usually negligible if not nonexistent, and as time goes on the occasions regarding the use of this weapon become progressively rarer. My Secretary of State is in agreement with the view expressed above and endorses the principles hitherto accepted. The question of the use of air action against hostile Yemeni forces is of course an international matter which presents greater difficulty and requires careful examination."

policy but argued that rocket projectiles and aircraft cannon made it a more precise instrument.¹⁷ A forward policy of stationing Political Officers in more remote areas of the Protectorate and the need to protect them provided another argument for continued air action.¹⁸

The deterioration of security conditions in the Aden Protectorate and a fresh round of RAF activities in the mid-1950s received considerable attention in London. Attacks on government forts by the Rabizi tribe in late 1953 and early 1954 displayed serious implications because of growing anti-British sentiment, backing from Yemen's imam, and the tenacity of the rebels in the face of repeated RAF attacks. The following year saw political disaffection spread to other areas of the Protectorate and mutiny and desertion among the Aden Protectorate Levies. The result was a retreat from the forward policy of the previous years and the strengthening of efforts to counter the imam's activities.¹⁹ Further air operations in 1955 were criticized in the House of Commons and a recrudescence of dissident activity supported from Yemen forced the introduction of an army battalion at Aden, where the only ground forces hitherto had come from the RAF Regiment and the Aden Protectorate Levies. The permanent presence of the battalion at Aden also meant that it was available for use elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, without having to call upon the Strategic Reserve from Britain. The army assumed responsibility for Protectorate security in 1957, although air policing activities continued into the early 1960s.²⁰

Changing strategic requirements were fast creating overcrowding facilities in Aden, followed by a massive construction boom. But even as expansion was occurring in Aden, however, the seeds for eventual withdrawal were sprouting. A revolution in North Yemen in 1962 established the Yemen Arab Republic and introduced Egyptian troops to the Arabian Peninsula. Nasser provided considerable stimulus and support to dissidents in Aden Colony and Protectorate, where nationalist parties opposed to the British presence had already begun to appear.

EVOLVING COMMITMENTS AND THE OMAN WAR

British participation in the 1956 invasion of the Suez Canal was unquestionably a tremendous debacle, particularly as it affected Britain's relations with the Arab world – and thus its military presence in many Arab states. Its effect on strategic thinking was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, there was a instinctive feeling that all Britain's spending on conventional forces had gone

¹⁷In an RAF note on the Qutaybi operations of 1947, it was pointed out that "in 1934 and 1940/1941 air operations against the Quteibis lasted 61 and 127 days respectively. In 1947 the RAF obtained the submission of Quteibis in the equivalent of three days operations without the loss of a single life and without injury to any individuals on either side." AIR/2/10483, C-in-C RAF Middle East to the Undersecretary of State for Air, 22 Dec. 1947.

¹⁸AIR/2/1 0483, "The Aden Command, 1945-1947."

¹⁹R.J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975), pp. 336-338; and Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 142-148.

²⁰Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 90-91; and Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 148-155.

for nought – they might as well be got rid of and the money could be wiser spent on nuclear defense. This seemed to be the message of the 1957 Sandys White Paper, which stressed a nuclear priority, smaller but more mobile conventional forces, an eventual end to conscription and cuts in defense expenditure.²¹

At the same time, however, it was held by others that the poor showing in military terms at Suez was due to the starving of conventional forces. By this view, the lesson of Suez was that Britain needed to upgrade its forces and mobile capability since its overseas commitments would require British assistance for some time to come. This opinion not only tied in with government statements since 1954 but was reinforced by service lobbying. In addition to the army and air force, the navy began for the first time to show interest in the concept of limited war and the utility of light carriers and after the 1957 White Paper it became a leading advocate of a continued East-of-Suez role for Britain.²²

The government sought to balance the opposing views by placing more emphasis on a nuclear umbrella, even for the Far East, and at the same time relying heavily on the potential of an airlifted strategic reserve. As a consequence, strategic mobility became an integral part of British defense policy from the late 1950s through the economic collapse of 1967, and the concept was put to the test in the Arabian Peninsula during the Oman and Kuwait crises.²³ Despite the considerable logic of strategic mobility, the concept also contained real limitations which were largely overlooked. Manned and protected bases around the world were required as much as ever, in addition to considerable investment in strategic lift capability. In addition, the emergence of an air barrier across Middle East as a result of growing nationalism and especially the Suez debacle presented problems. Alternative routes had the disadvantage of additional length and both political and technical drawbacks, and the barrier meant that at least part of the strategic reserve had to be physically located

²¹The background on British strategy for this section is drawn largely from Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 94-133.

²²DeWitt C. Armstrong, "The British Re-Value Their Strategic Bases," *JRUSI*, Vol. 104, No. 616 (Nov. 1959), pp. 423-432. The loss of Trincomalee in 1958 was a serious blow to the navy. The East Indies Command was abolished and its responsibilities divided between a Far East Command and a new Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf Station – the rank of Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf, was upgraded to Commodore to take charge of the new command and he was named Naval Deputy to the Commander of British Forces, Arabian Peninsula. Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 128.

²³A guiding formulation of this policy was Neville Brown's *Strategic Mobility* (London: Chatto and Windus, for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1963; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964). See also A.D.R.G. Wilson, "The Relevance of Air Mobility to the Middle East," *Army Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Jan. 1955), pp. 161-184; Robert Saundby, "Air Power in Limited Wars," *JRUSI*, Vol. 103, No. 611 (Aug. 1958), pp. 378-383; and Anthony Verrier, "Strategically Mobile Forces – U.S. Theory and British Practice," *JRUSI*, Vol. 106, No. 624 (Nov. 1961), pp. 479-485.

East-of-Suez.²⁴ To some extent, a sea barrier came into existence as well when control of the Suez Canal passed to Egypt.

A key effect of Suez and the emerging air barrier was to stimulate consideration of the East-of-Suez arena as an independent theater of operations on its own merits and to open up British strategic debate from sole concentration on a potential total war to fighting limited wars (half-wars). The weakness of the newly independent states of the Indian Ocean basin virtually guaranteed British involvement in local insurgencies, as happened in Malaya and Kenya in the 1950s. Effective response to such low-level conflicts required the development of appropriate force structures and strategies.

The appearance of a rebellion in Oman in the late 1950s very effectively illustrated the problems Britain would face in fulfilling its regional obligations. First, the Oman campaign demonstrated the limitations of air power and the need to use ground forces to concentrate insurgents before air operations could be of use. The experience in Oman also strengthened the case for expanding airlift capacity, as well as for the commando carrier project, and it emphasized the need for stationing acclimated troops in Aden and Kenya. Finally, it drove the lesson home that policing operations must be carried out quickly to avoid awkward political repercussions and hostile opinion from other countries.²⁵

Since the early years of the twentieth century, Oman had been politically fragmented between the British-backed sultanate of the coast and a tribally dominated imamate in the interior. The dynasty of Al Bu Sa‘id *sultans* in Muscat had originated in the eighteenth century as *imams*, quasi-national leaders of the Ibadi sect of Islam who embodied religious as well as secular functions. Gradually, the Al Bu Sa‘id rulers had shifted their attention from the isolated interior and its balance-of-power tribal politics to the coast with its opportunities for maritime trade and overseas expansion. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Muscat sultanate had come on hard times and survived only because of the protection and financial assistance of the Government of India. The tribes of the interior united behind a newly elected *imam* and attacked the capital in 1915; Muscat's fall was prevented by the despatch of Indian Army troops to defend it. The country's effective division was formalized by the Agreement of al-Sib (1920) which recognized the autonomy of the interior.²⁶

While the strong-willed Sultan Sa‘id b. Taymur (r.1932-1970) especially chafed at this division, there was little he could do until the highly respected old *imam* died in 1954. The struggle for succession was dominated by an ambitious trio, composed of Sulayman b. Himyar al-Nabhani, paramount *shaykh* of the powerful Bani Riyam tribe, and his confederates Talib and Ghalib b. ‘Ali al-Hinawi, both of whom had been minor officials in the imamate. Ghalib b. ‘Ali was successful in

²⁴By 1960, the British air traffic was rerouted from Malta to Kano, Nigeria, and then across central Africa to Nairobi. The potential of similar problems with nationalist opposition to British bases in South and Southeast Asia was sidestepped with the building of the base on Gan, in the Maldives. Armstrong, "The British Re-Value Their Strategic Bases," pp. 423-432.

²⁵Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 128-133.

²⁶For more information, see J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978).

pressing his claims to the office of *imam* but his election was disputed by many Omanis, thus weakening his claims to legitimacy and eroding tribal support for his leadership.

As divisions were appearing in the interior, Sultan Sa'id b. Taymur revived his efforts to reincorporate the interior into the sultanate. The largely British-owned Petroleum Development (Oman) (PDO) backed the *sultan* because of the prospect of discovering oil in Oman's interior, while official British assistance was forthcoming because of Saudi involvement. In 1952, a Saudi military party occupied part of al-Buraymi oasis on the border between Abu Dhabi and Oman. In addition to potentially pushing Saudi borders far to the east, into territory where oil deposits were thought to be, the Buraymi occupation also enabled Riyadh to expand ties to such figures of the Omani interior as Sulayman b. Himyar and Imam Ghalib, who were willing to accept Saudi money and arms to further their ambitions.

As a consequence, the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF) was formed with PDO funds to escort an oil company exploration team. The joint column assembled on Oman's southern shore in early 1954 and moved inland along the edge of the great Rub' al-Khali desert to the oil-bearing strata at Fahud. Subsequently, the MOFF occupied the town of 'Ibri which sat on the route between al-Buraymi and the heart of inner Oman, and the British-officered Trucial Oman Scouts drove the Saudis out of al-Buraymi. With the severing of the Saudi connection, the way was open to reoccupation of all the Omani interior. In December 1955, the MOFF moved into Nizwa, the imamate's capital, and soon after Sultan Sa'id made a tour of the interior. Imam Ghalib had made a public abdication and Sulayman b. Himyar offered his submission to the *sultan*.

Talib b. 'Ali, the erstwhile *imam*'s brother, however, had escaped to Saudi Arabia where he began to raise an army. In mid-1957, Talib secretly made his way back into Oman, accompanied by trained men and Saudi-supplied arms and ammunition. He joined forces with his brother Ghalib, who reasserted his claim to the imamate, and Sulayman b. Himyar, and together the rebels routed the *sultan*'s forces in the interior and raised the flag of the imamate over Nizwa again.

Sultan Sa'id was left with no choice but to call for British assistance.²⁷ His request, coming in the aftermath of Suez, met with heated parliamentary debate and fears that Britain would become embroiled in a "second Suez." British involvement also provoked outside protests. In an unlikely combination, Saudi Arabia and Egypt led vocal opposition within the Arab League to "British colonialism" in Oman and the outcry was taken up by Third-World forces at the United Nations,

²⁷The following discussion of this insurgency is drawn principally from J.E. Peterson, "Britain and 'the Oman War': An Arabian Entanglement," *Asian Affairs* (London), Vol. 63, Pt. 3 (Oct. 1976), pp. 285-298. Other important sources include David Dec. Smiley, "Muscat and Oman," *JRUSI*, Vol. 105, No. 617 (Feb. 1960), pp. 29-47; Phillip Warner, *The Special Air Service* (London: William Kimber, 1971), pp. 209-221; Colin Maxwell, *Short History of the Sultan's Armed Forces* (Bayt al-Falaj, Oman, mimeographed, Nov. 1969); and Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 122-137. For autobiographical accounts, see Anthony Shepherd, *Arabian Adventure* (London: Collins, 1961); P.S. Allfree, *Warlords of Oman* (London: Robert Hale, 1967); David DeC. Smiley, with Peter Kemp, *Arabian Assignment* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975); and Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977).

where it regularly surfaced on the General Assembly's agenda until the early 1970s.²⁸ The situation was further complicated by the Anglo-American rivalry in the Peninsula; the US had quietly supported Saudi Arabia in its occupation of al-Buraymi, since the Saudi oil concession was held by American firms, and the Omani rebels utilized American arms and equipment.

In mid-July, the RAF began to launch strikes against key Omani forts by Venom fighters based at Sharjah. It was obvious, however, that these attacks had little effect on the dissidents and that ground forces would be required. Indeed, a principal outcome of the Oman war was to sound the death-knell for the RAF's traditional reliance on air control when dealing with Arab tribes. While Trenchard's policy had been effective in earlier decades in forcing recalcitrant and disorganized tribes to accept the authority of a central government, it was incapable by itself of bringing organized, determined dissidents to submission. Even the heavier firepower of the 1950s-vintage rockets and cannon had little effect on such rebel strongholds as the rock-and-cement fortress at Nizwa or Oman's high-mountain caves to which the rebels eventually retreated.

As a consequence of the limited utility of air strikes, a two-pronged ground attack was mounted. A combined force of sultanate troops, Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS), Cameronians and Ferret armored cars moved south from al-Buraymi toward Nizwa while another sultanate column left Muscat for the interior via the principal mountain pass. Within a week, Nizwa and the other major settlements of inner Oman had been captured with only a few small skirmishes; casualties amounted to one dead and 4 wounded among the Anglo-sultanate forces and about 30 deaths among the dissidents. The rebel hard core, however, escaped to the safety of the high plateau of al-Jabal al-Akhdar. Stalemate ensued for the next year-and-a-half. The British troops were withdrawn from Oman but the *sultan's* forces could only cordon off the Jabal al-Akhdar massif and try to put an end to the rebels' minelaying activities along major roads. In 1958, the small Omani military units were reorganized into the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), with a seconded British commander and attempts were intensified to create a modern, professional military force capable of dealing with the rebels, as well as garrisoning the interior. Meanwhile, Britain's role in Oman continued to be attacked in international fora.

It soon became clear that putting an end to hostile international opinion would require removal of the rebel stronghold in the Omani mountains. Accomplishment of the latter, however, depended on the reintroduction of British forces. Several squadrons of a Special Air Service (SAS) regiment, on their way home from fighting communist insurgents in Malaya, were rerouted to Oman. In January 1959, these squadrons, backed up by SAF units, a TOS squadron, some Life Guards and tribal levies, stormed the Jabal al-Akhdar stronghold in a coordinated surprise attack. The majority of the rebels on the high plateau quickly surrendered and information identifying rebel sympathizers within the country were captured. This well-planned and virtually bloodless operation essentially

²⁸Two UN fact-finding missions were sent to the region, although the *sultan* allowed only the first to enter the country. Their reports are contained in United Nations General Assembly, 18th Session, 8 Oct. 1963, *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on His Visit to Oman*, A/5562 ("the de Ribbing Report"); and UN General Assembly, 19th Session, 22 Jan. 1965, *Question of Oman; Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Oman*, A/5846 ("the Jiménez Report"). The Arab Information Center in New York published several pro-imamate pamphlets during this period.

put an end to organized resistance in Oman.²⁹ The three dissident leaders, Sulayman, Ghalib and Talib, however, managed to escape and set up camp in Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Iraq, where they maintained the "Oman Liberation Army" for a renewed attack that never came.³⁰

The Oman episode went against the general tide of diminishing British military involvement in East-of-Suez obligations. Unlike the case elsewhere, British military – as well political – ties to the sultanate were actually strengthened. London undertook primary responsibility for the creation of a professional army, air force, and putative navy in Oman, and continued to staff the country's principal military positions through the 1980s by secondment from British forces and private contract of British officers. At the same time, Sultan Sa'id was pressured to open his country up to development; the lack of headway in this regard appears to have prompted British encouragement of the 1970 *coup* whereby Sa'id was replaced by his modernist-oriented son Qabus.

From a strategic point-of-view, the Oman war illustrated the necessity of maintaining appropriate British forces capable of moving quickly to global hotspots and dealing effectively with local insurgencies around the world. Col. David Stirling, the founder of the SAS, asserted that the SAS by this operation had achieved their "truce peace-time role."³¹ British concern with the security of the sultanate undoubtedly was influenced by Oman's strategic location at the entrance to the oil-rich Gulf as much as by a sense of obligation to a long-time ally. This concern was to prompt British involvement in Oman's defense against the rebels in Dhufar a few years later, even after Britain had withdrawn officially from the Gulf and the last of its major East-of-Suez commitments.

THE PROBLEM OF DEPLOYMENT AND THE DEFENSE OF KUWAIT

At the beginning of the 1960s, Britain's role East-of-Suez not only had not declined but, almost paradoxically, had been strengthened in some respects. Whitehall felt obliged to honor residual colonial commitments throughout the region, and these commitments involved assistance in fairly frequent crises. Furthermore, new multilateral commitments were added, such as SEATO and CENTO obligations. There was also the matter of a largely unstated but nevertheless heartfelt belief that Britain must defend its economic interests; this was especially true for the Gulf due to the

²⁹Despite the decisive role of ground forces in this campaign, David Lee points out the value of air power operating in tandem with the ground forces, particularly in reconnaissance, softening up rebel positions and resupplying British troops. In addition, he mentions the advantage of mounting sizeable air operations without generating the kind of publicity that the sending of large numbers of British troops would have attracted. Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, p. 137.

³⁰The erstwhile imamate leaders continued to enjoy the rhetorical support of radical Arab and Third-World states for years to come but were never able to return to Oman. During the 1960s, the rebels were only a minor nuisance to British interests in the Gulf, capable only of setting off an occasional bomb, bungling an assassination attempt on an Omani official, and sinking a British India passenger ship. After the palace *coup d'État* in Oman in 1970, brief reconciliation talks were held without any positive results and the rebel leaders remained in exile in Saudi Arabia.

³¹Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 10 Apr. 1959.

heavy capital investment in oil companies and British dependence on Gulf oil supplies. Finally, the ingrained sense that Britain was still a world power with a natural role around the globe underpinned specific commitments. The British presence East-of-Suez rested on longstanding historical foundations and HMG simply could not pull out of the area without having a very good reason. If the empire had to be dismantled, many felt that the process of withdrawal should be carried out in an orderly fashion and not until viable and durable structures had been left behind.³²

All of these considerations were particularly applicable to the Gulf. This was recognized in the 1962 defense White Paper, which emphasized that the British role in the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf and Southeast Asia and that forces there would have to be maintained, even if this caused a retraction of forces in Europe and the Mediterranean.³³ This renewed mood in favor of a continuing role in the Indian Ocean and in upholding obligations there was put to the test by the Kuwait crisis of 1961. In many ways, the Kuwait operation provides valuable lessons for US planning in the 1980s.

The shaykhdom of Kuwait had come under British protection by the treaty of 1899 and thus was comparable to Bahrain and the Trucial States in its relations with Britain. However, oil production on a large scale began at an earlier date in Kuwait than in any other Peninsula state and so the shaykhdom was fully prepared for independence earlier than its neighbors. On 19 June 1961, Britain recognized Kuwait's complete independence, promising to provide assistance in defense if required, and Kuwait applied for membership in the Arab League. Less than a week later, Iraq's revolutionary government laid claim to the entirety of Kuwait.³⁴

The claim was followed by indications that Iraqi reinforcements and armor were moving south to al-Basra, only a few hours from the Kuwaiti border, although it was unclear whether this was a prelude to invasion or simply part of preparations for a national day parade. As a result, the Kuwaiti amir formally requested British and Saudi Arabian assistance on 30 June.³⁵ Because of Kuwait's extreme vulnerability, plans for rapid military intervention in the emirate had been drawn up previously under the codename "Vantage." One contingency anticipated a need for British assistance in maintaining internal security while the other was formulated to meet an Iraqi armored

³²Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 147-156.

³³Ibid., pp. 223-224.

³⁴The legal basis of the Iraqi claim rested on Kuwait's previous ambiguous status within the Ottoman Empire. While the shaykhs of Kuwait had been forced to cooperate with Ottoman authorities in al-Basra during the nineteenth century, they had not considered themselves Ottoman subjects nor was Ottoman sovereignty over Kuwait ever recognized by Britain. Furthermore, the newly independent Iraqi monarchy had recognized Kuwait's sovereignty in the Iraq-Kuwait treaty of 1932. Further evidence that the 1961 Iraqi claim was advanced for political purposes rather than being legal in character came in 1963, when the Qasim government was overthrown and the new regime officially recognized the sovereign status of Kuwait in October of that year. For a discussion of the merits of the Iraqi claim, see Husain M. Albaharna, *The Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and Their International Problems* (2nd rev. ed.; Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975), pp. 250-258.

³⁵The following discussion is drawn principally from Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 165-188; Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 219-223 and 244-249; Brown, *Strategic Mobility*, pp. 88-96; and Verrier, "Strategically Mobile Forces." See also Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 166-173.

threat, and thus called for deployment in some force. As the Iraqi threat was being evaluated, British authorities in Aden and the Gulf undertook preliminary steps to move forces into position. Consequently, when the formal call for help came, British forces were able to react quickly and some units arrived within 24 hours.

In part, the quick response was due to the prepositioning of units and supplies in the region. Eight Centurion tanks and ammunition had been stored in Kuwait and a large cache of armored cars, other vehicles, ammunition and miscellaneous equipment was being held in nearby Bahrain. The navy had an Amphibious Warfare Squadron based at Bahrain, including half a squadron of Centurion tanks on board an LST and another shipful already in the vicinity preparing to relieve the first. One of the three frigates assigned to the Gulf was in Bahrain at the time and the other two soon returned from Karachi and Mombasa. A carrier group was dispatched from Hong Kong and arrived on 9 July. Various army and air force units were standing by in Sharjah, Aden and Kenya, and tank crews and fighter aircraft were transferred to Bahrain. Fortuitously, a commando ship of Royal Marines was already on its way to the Gulf for training exercises.

On the morning of 1 July, the Royal Marine commandos were landed at Kuwait airport by helicopter and were joined by two squadrons of Hunter fighters and the first elements of a contingent of Saudi paratroopers. The commandos were soon moved up to join Kuwait army units on a ridge north of Kuwait City. Getting the tanks on land proved to be a problem, due to lack of a landing ramp for the LST, and they had to be ferried ashore. The introduction of men and equipment was hampered also by the temporary and partial ban by Turkey and Sudan of overflight rights and severe dust storms in Kuwait. Many of the aircraft used in the operation had to be based in Bahrain, due to the congestion and lack of ground control facilities at the Kuwait New airfield. As planned, command arrangements were also concentrated in Bahrain, as the C-in-C Middle East Command temporarily moved his headquarters there, and was joined there by his GOC and AOC (all three normally headquartered in Aden), as well as by the Flag Officer Middle East (permanently based in Bahrain); the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf also resided in Bahrain.

By 9 July, the maximum extent of British forces were in place; British personnel in Kuwait totalled nearly 6000. They were supported by 1600 Kuwaiti troops organized into a tank squadron, a field battery, and several mobile groups in jeeps and armored cars. To meet the Iraqi threat, two battalions were deployed along Mutla Ridge just north of Kuwait Bay, supported by British and Kuwaiti tanks and artillery and with an advance force of armored cars between the ridge and the border. A third battalion, with a squadron of Centurions, was kept in reserve as a counterattack force, a fourth was held in reserve in Kuwait City and a fifth was standing by in Bahrain. The operation was afflicted by problems in communications overloading and the absence of adequate radar capability. Fortunately, the real potential for Iraq to exploit air defense weaknesses was offset by poor visibility and flying conditions caused by the dust storms.

It is probable that an Iraqi attack, if it had been forthcoming, would be aimed at a largely symbolic seizure of Kuwait's northern oilfields, rather than an all-out assault on Kuwait Town, which would have been politically devastating to Iraq's pan-Arab position. If Iraq had carried out such a strategy, the forces defending Kuwait would have been forced onto the tactical offensive and it is questionable whether the British/Kuwaiti forces were adequate to recover a sliver of occupied territory.

However, an Iraqi attack never materialized and it is uncertain whether one was actually intended. In any case, British forces in Kuwait were kept there until after the Iraqi national day (14 July) and then gradually withdrawn. Shortly after Kuwait's admission to the Arab League in August, a small Arab League force replaced remaining British troops and these troops soon numbered between 2000 and 3000. In addition, the British army and RAF garrisons at Bahrain were maintained at a higher level than before the crisis.

Despite the fact that the capability of the forces assembled in Kuwait was not tested, the affair had a demonstrable effect in boosting British confidence in both the ability to carry out the strategic mobility doctrine and in the idea that there was still a positive role to be played in far flung parts of the world. Nevertheless, there were serious lessons to be learned from the Kuwait crisis. British action was generally considered to have prevented or deterred an Iraqi attack, but the greatly superior Iraqi ratio in aircraft and tanks rendered the adequacy of the defending forces questionable if hostilities had occurred.³⁶ Furthermore, the lack of airspace depth and dependence on shipborne radar severely limited the possibility of early warning. While Britain clearly had demonstrated its determination to defend Kuwait's sovereignty, it had done so at a cost of £1 million. Subsequent Iraqi verbal provocations produced a far smaller British response, indicating the futility of mounting a large-scale operation every time the remote possibility of a threat to Kuwait was sensed.

The operation was useful as a "training exercise" to point up unanticipated problems. For example, the restrictions on overflights made by Turkey and Sudan caused some flights from the UK to proceed via Central Africa and thus taxed British lift capacity to a greater degree than expected. Kuwait quickly became one of the most difficult locations to reach by air. Thus, delays in moving men and equipment into the area combined with inadequate air cover for ships on their way to or standing off the emirate and poor flying conditions to point out the need for continued emphasis on the role of sea lift and seapower in such operations.

The value of prepositioning men, arms and equipment in the region was thoroughly demonstrated by rapidity with which the Centurions were operational. It was of considerable advantage to have Bahrain as a forward command center – and for use as a reserve location for storing supplies and protecting aircraft. Similarly, the location of regional service commands, equipment and personnel at nearby Aden or even in Cyprus and Kenya greatly simplified the problem of rapid deployment. Furthermore, the value of having troops already stationed in the area was proven by the high incidence of heat casualties among troops flown in from Kenya, Cyprus and the UK (a problem that also afflicted the Oman operations a few years earlier). Finally, it is questionable whether the British ability to move enough force into Kuwait in a matter of days would have been possible without thorough planning for just such a contingency and the full cooperation of the Kuwaiti government.

³⁶Neville Brown notes that out of a total Iraqi army strength of four or five infantry divisions and several armored brigades, the Baghdad government would have had to keep one in the center of the country to support the government against political and tribal intrigues while Kurdish insurgency in the north would have required one or two divisions, leaving a small margin of troops available for offensive operations outside of Iraq. On the other hand, the increase in the firepower and mobility from the influx of first British and then Soviet equipment in the 1950s undoubtedly raised the confidence of the Iraqi armed forces and by 1961 their pilots had become familiarized with their new Soviet planes and had the advantage of first strike. *Strategic Mobility*, pp. 91-92.

THE STRUGGLE FOR ADEN

During the 1960s, it became increasingly apparent that Britain's overseas commitments, particularly in the Indian Ocean, were becoming increasingly burdensome and expensive – both financially and politically. The United States, with its emerging involvement in Vietnam, encouraged Britain to share Western security burdens in Africa and especially Asia. A plethora of crises around the world in the early to mid-1960s severely strained the capability of British forces to attend to them all, especially as the opposing forces improved.

In many ways, dealing with these isolated hotspots was more burdensome than defense of the entire empire had been in years past. "The deterrent force of a British gunboat in the Persian Gulf in the nineteenth century or British aircraft in Iraq in the twenties and thirties had little relevance in the fifties and sixties against well-armed and organized enemies, very often trained and supplied from the outside."³⁷ At the same time, British bases were fast disappearing and relocation to more secure locations was not only expensive but recognized as only a temporary palliative. Apart from Britain, only two main overseas bases remained: Aden and Singapore.

Service rivalry emerged in attempts to get around the dilemma of basing on foreign soil: the RAF promoted an island-staging scheme across the Indian Ocean while the navy pressed for new aircraft carriers. In many ways, the rivalry in the 1960s amounted to a reprise of the inter-service debate of four decades earlier. During the 1920s, the imperial policing role might well have saved the independent existence of the RAF from the attempts by the army and the navy to partition it. The RAF played a similar card in the mid-1960s when it felt its existence threatened by the gains made by the Royal Navy in providing the strategic nuclear deterrent with nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines, rather than bombers.

Thus, the RAF placed considerable emphasis on the East-of-Suez policing role, stressing the strategic and financial advantages of the island-basing scheme over the navy's traditional carrier role. At the heart of the debate was the necessity, for budgetary reasons, of making a choice between development of the RAF's F-111 long-range reconnaissance and bombing aircraft and the navy's CVA-01 class of fleet carriers. Victory went to the RAF in the 1966 Defence White Paper which accepted the RAF argument on East-of-Suez air power and authorized development of the F-111 while scuttling the CVA-01 carrier.³⁸

By the late 1950s, Aden had emerged as one of the last secure British footholds in the Middle East, and the development of the air and sea barriers across the Middle East increased the colony's military importance even more. Even Kenya, perceived as another option during the shift away from the Mediterranean in the 1950s, was no longer viable at the beginning of the 1960s. In the three years following the Suez crisis and establishment of a separate Middle East Command, Aden's

³⁷Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 329-330.

³⁸On reaction to the loss of base facilities, see Armstrong, "The British Re-Value Their Strategic Bases," pp. 423-432; for a discussion of the merits of the island-staging scheme, see Neville Brown, *Arms Without Empire: British Defence Role in the Modern World* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), pp. 51-57; on the F-111/CVA-01 battle, see Desmond Wettern, *The Decline of British Seapower* (London: Jane's, 1982), pp. 263-276.

service population quadrupled and the hitherto-isolated colony witnessed the largest military construction program in British history.³⁹ By 1964, Aden held over 8000 British troops, not including dependents.⁴⁰

But even as Fortress Aden was being built up, internal pressures against British ownership were emerging. The consequence of this clash of goals was a full-scale guerrilla war that Britain was unable to win without investing far more political and military capital than it was willing. While eventual withdrawal from Aden was widely accepted, the ferocity of the anti-British struggle certainly accelerated the British retreat.

The net effect of the long British control over Aden was to fossilize the archaic political structure of the Protectorate while developing Aden Colony as a "modernized" enclave populated by a diverse range of ethnic groups and cultural influences. As traditional goals and institutions persisted in the hinterland, the burgeoning city of Aden exhibited strong, centralized control, an effective administration, a professional army and civil service, and a strengthening union movement. Significantly, the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC) was in the forefront of the first stirrings of opposition to British rule. When the militant demands of Adeni nationalists were not met, they turned increasingly to campaigns of political violence and by the mid-1960s the British were confronted with a full-scale guerrilla war in both Aden Colony and Protectorate.

Essentially, four different groups had sought to lead the organized opposition to British rule.⁴¹ The first of these was the South Arabian League (SAL), founded in 1950 by young men of the Protectorate. Ultimately, the SAL failed to have much impact and was bypassed by more radical organizations, largely because it drew its membership from the Protectorate's elite, was dominated by the interests of Lahj (the sultanate just outside Aden), and the ATUC was seen as a more effective a vehicle for political protest. The second group, the People's Socialist Party (PSP) was formed as the political wing of the ATUC, was dominated by 'Abdullah al-Asnaj, and operated exclusively within the Colony. Although, like the SAL, it originally opposed armed struggle, eventually it turned to acts of violence, the most spectacular of which was the assassination attempt on the British High Commissioner's life in December 1963. In 1965, the SAL and the PSP joined together in the Organization for the Liberation of the Occupied South (OLOS) as a result of formidable competition from the newer National Liberation Front and Egyptian pressure for unity among the groups.

³⁹Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 209-210.

⁴⁰Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, p. 344.

⁴¹Background on the political factions in Aden can be found in a variety of sources, especially Abdallah S. Bujra, "Urban Elites and Colonialism: The Nationalist Elites of Aden and South Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1970), pp. 189-211; Jean-Pierre Viennot, "L'Experience revolutionnaire du Sud-Yemen," *Maghreb-Machrek*, No. 59 (Sept.-Oct. 1973), pp. 73-80; Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*; Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974; New York: Vintage, 1975); Robert W. Stookey, *South Yemen: A Marxist Republic in Arabia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; London: Croom Helm, 1982); and Joseph Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

The National Liberation Front (NLF) first appeared in the late 1950s as a coalition between the local branch of the Arab Nationalists' Movement (ANM) and several other small groups.⁴² While relatively moderate at first, the NLF gradually turned more radical and carried out guerrilla and terrorist operations against the British from an early date. The organization's uncompromising anti-British stance and its strong ties to the Protectorate helped it to dominate the political scene in the mid-1960s and to outmaneuver the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), its principal rival. FLOSY had grown out of the attempt of Egyptian president Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir to unite the NLF with OLOS in 1966. However, Nasir's domination of the fledgling Yemen Arab Republic in North Yemen at that time turned the more militant members of the NLF against Nasirism and only a few pro-Nasir NLF leaders remained in FLOSY. The NLF used its strength in the hinterland to take over most of the Protectorate in the closing days of the independence struggle and it was to the NLF that Britain left Aden at the end of 1967.⁴³

The first major uprising against the British in Aden began in 1963 in the Radfan, an isolated region directly north of Aden itself and not far from the North Yemen border. While the tribes of Radfan were officially under the amirate of al-Dali', in effect they were independent. They had given the British trouble for many years, particularly the Qutaybis, and British air operations had been necessary into the early 1960s. But the revolution in North Yemen and introduction of Egyptian troops and other officials there, and NLF recruiting in the Protectorate added a more serious element of politicization to traditional tribal truculence.⁴⁴

In early 1964, it became clear that the situation in Radfan was no longer a matter of punishing the Radfani tribes for interrupting road traffic but the beginning of a guerrilla war. The tribes had become better organized and were armed with modern weapons. British apprehensions had been heightened by the narrowly unsuccessful attempt on the life of Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, the High Commissioner, at Aden airport in December 1963. Consequently, Operation Nutcracker was devised as a full-scale effort to nip burgeoning rebellion in the bud. In addition to the difficulty of coping with hit-and-run guerrilla tactics by skilled fighters, the operation faced the problems of particularly rugged topography and extreme heat.

⁴²The ANM played a very strong role in the ideological evolution of many Arab intellectuals, including Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, Kuwaiti and other groups. For a comprehensive study of the ANM, see Walid W. Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and His Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London: Charles Knight, 1975).

⁴³This brief survey cannot do justice to the myriad of factions and ideological tendencies contained within the NLF during the 1960s and 1970s. After independence, the hardcore Marxist wing of the party was able to strengthen its stranglehold on power as the result of actions in 1969, 1971 and 1978 – before a relatively more moderate leadership assumed charge in 1980. In addition to the above sources, see Fred Halliday, "Yemen's Unfinished Revolution: Socialism in the South," *MERIP Reports*, No. 81 (Oct. 1979), pp. 3-20; and J.E. Peterson, *Conflict in the Yemens and Superpower Involvement* (Washington: Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Occasional Paper, 1981).

⁴⁴The Radfan campaign is covered by T.M.P. Stevens, "Operations in the Radfan, 1964," *JRUSI*, Vol. 110, No. 640 (Nov. 1965), pp. 335-346; Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden 1964-67* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 23-110; and Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 203-219. For a critical view, see Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, pp. 195-199.

In January 1964, a large force consisting of infantry troops from the army of the newly created Federation of South Arabia, one of their armored car squadrons, and British tanks, artillery and engineers was assembled at the entrance pass to Radfan, where a light airfield was suitable for RAF use in helicopter support of the operation. The absence of suitable maps and adequate intelligence on insurgent movements made the going difficult but eventually the two main valleys were secured at a cost of less than two dozen casualties. However, it was decided that the risks and costs of maintaining a garrison in Radfan were considered too great and the force was withdrawn. This development was followed by incursions across the border by Yemeni aircraft and then retaliation by an air attack on a Yemeni fort in March.

A second assault on Radfan strongholds was ordered in April, after it appeared that as many as 200 Egyptian-trained guerrillas had infiltrated into the region. In April, the base at Thumayr was reoccupied and the units of Radforce (short for Radfan Force) were assembled there. This force totalled approximately 3000 men and included Royal Marine commandos, paratroopers, two Federal army battalions, armored cars, an artillery battery and a troop of engineers. The lack of sufficient numbers of helicopters ruled out a heliborne assault on the mountains surrounding the main valleys and a longer, more difficult campaign had to be based on a combination of paratroop drops by night and arduous hikes up to the peaks from the valley floor. Control of the region was made all the more difficult by far stronger resistance than expected. It was not until early June that the attacking forces were in position to capture Jabal Hurriya, which dominated all Radfan. The rebels stood their ground on the slopes of the mountain and fought a pitched battle, melting away after dark. The peak was then reached without incident.

The Radfan had been pacified, apart from a dwindling number of attacks over the next few months. A campaign expected to last only three weeks had taken over three months and required far larger forces than anticipated. This was partly because of the lengthy period required to build up adequate forces but also was due to the skillful tactics, determination and entrenchment of the defending guerrillas. Adequate air forces proved to be absolutely vital in the operation, whether it was helicopters providing necessary mobility in such a forbidding environment and resupplying troops in advanced positions or strike aircraft providing close air support. In the final analysis, however, this forcible occupation of Radfan was only the first step in a long and involved anti-guerrilla campaign. After Radfan, the focus turned back to Aden.

There, the guerrilla campaign relied on attacks on military installations and assassination attempts on British and Adeni officials, beginning with the PSP's attack on Trevaskis in December 1963.⁴⁵ It had been clear for some time that Britain eventually would have to go and in mid-1964 the date of departure was set for 1968. It remained necessary to create a viable structure for afterwards. The preferred solution was the Federation of South Arabia, a cumbersome federal union between centralized and modernized Aden and the tiny, disparate states of the Protectorate; this

⁴⁵On the struggle for Aden see Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, pp. 113-260; Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, pp. 199-222; Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, pp. 318-351; Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 220-256; Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen*; and David Ledger, *Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia* (London: Peninsular Publishing, 1983). In addition, see the accounts by two British High Commissioners during this period, in Sir Charles Johnston, *The View from Steamer Point* (London: Collins, 1964); and Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

arrangement presumably would allow Britain to retain its military base at Aden. Nevertheless, as the anti-British opposition began to intensify, the federal experiment looked more and more fragile and the British dominant influence more apparent.

The new Labour government of 1964 sought to downplay the federation in favor of conciliation with the nationalists and ‘Abd al-Qawi Makkawi, a more moderate PSP leader, was appointed Chief Minister. But even Makkawi proved less than malleable and a year later the British resumed direct control of the Aden government. Clearly, even at this date, hopes for a peaceful transition were fast fading. Consequently, the February 1966 Defence White Paper announced that the Aden base would be abandoned in 1968. At that point, British policy was reduced to finding a graceful way to withdraw its troops and to decide to whom the government should be handed over. It was clear that there would be no place for the Protectorate's rulers in an independent state.

None of this was an easy task. The level of fighting between the NLF and FLOSY rivalled that of the nationalists with the British. Terrorist attacks steadily increased and the trustworthiness of the Arab administration, police and federal armed forces increasingly became suspect. Terrorist incidents had increased from 36 in 1964 to nearly 3000 in 1967.⁴⁶ The increase prompted a belated decision to remove British dependents (even as late as January 1967, there were over 9000 dependents in Aden) and the task was completed in July.⁴⁷ At the same time, another irritating security problem arose from the relatively regular border penetration by Egyptian MiGs and the consequent necessity to institute air patrols.

As 1967 began, the more radical NLF gathered strong support in the hinterland and easily outduelled FLOSY. The final nail in FLOSY's coffin was Egypt's defeat in the June 1967 war, which destroyed ‘Abd al-Nasir's capacity to help FLOSY and exposed the organization's complete dependence on a foreign power. At the same time, the NLF stepped up its pressure and attacks on beleaguered British forces, as well as against Adeni leaders and institutions deemed to be tainted with collaboration. The role of British forces was reduced to steady retreat and in March the date of withdrawal was pushed up to November 1967. There would be no time to build up viable pro-British institutions to leave behind, and any such effort was bound to be futile. By June, the NLF had begun to take control over the Protectorate as the British retreated into Aden. Even the important Crater section of Aden was briefly occupied by the NLF that summer. Several months later, FLOSY was decisively driven from the battlefield and the federal army (which had been renamed the South Arabian Army upon the collapse of the federal government) declared for the NLF.

The evacuation of British troops from their newly constructed quarters began in June 1967 and the perimeters around Aden gradually shrank throughout the remainder of the year to the immediate vicinity of Khormaksar airfield. Belated arrangements for the transfer of power from the British to the NLF took place in Geneva in mid-November 1967, and on 28 and 29 November the last 2000 remaining men were transferred by helicopter to ships waiting offshore. The following day, the People's Republic of Southern Yemen (later renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) officially declared its independence. British military forces had lost 57 lives and suffered

⁴⁶Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, p. 264.

⁴⁷Lee, *Flight from the Middle East*, pp. 238-239.

another 651 casualties during the war for Aden, while 18 British civilians were killed and 58 wounded. Total casualties were reckoned at more than 2000.⁴⁸

With departure from Aden, the British military presence in the Middle East were reduced to installations in Bahrain, Sharjah, and Oman, where the mission was to protect Kuwait from external aggression along with the Gulf states still under British protection. In Bahrain and Sharjah, new arrangements were reached to permit increases in the sizes and manpower strength of the British facilities there. With the imminent closure of Middle East Command, a Commander British Forces Gulf (CBFG) took charge in Bahrain in September 1967 and units and equipment from all three services were systematically transferred to Gulf facilities. Before long, British personnel in the Gulf had grown to between 7000 and 8000.⁴⁹ There they remained for only four short years until the decision was made to withdraw from the Gulf. That left the two RAF bases in Oman as the only British military installations in the Middle East.

THE LAST OUTPOST: OMAN AND THE DHUFAR REBELLION

British influence has been strong in Oman for nearly a century, even though the sultanate has always been an independent state. Despite British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971, the influence in Oman continued at very nearly the same level. A principal reason for this was the rebellion in Oman's southern province of Dhufar. Although the rebellion began as a tribal insurrection against a reactionary and paternalistic sultan, it soon developed nationalist overtones and eventually the rebel leadership fell to committed Marxists, supported by newly independent South Yemen.⁵⁰

Oman's sultan, Sa'id b. Taymur, who had united the country with British help in the 1950s, was still on the throne in the late 1960s when Oman's first oil revenues began. Nevertheless, his reluctance to develop the country and his continued heavyhanded rule provoked increasing discontent. This was particularly the case in Dhufar. In many ways, Dhufar resembles part of Yemen than Oman and in fact it was politically annexed to the sultanate only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For the next century, succeeding sultans used the province's seaside capital at Salala for holidays and as a private estate. But the winds of change and prosperity elsewhere in the

⁴⁸Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, p. 264.

⁴⁹Sir William Luce, "Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and Persian Gulf," *JRUSI*, Vol. 114, No. 653 (Mar. 1969), p. 7.

⁵⁰This section is drawn largely from J.E. Peterson, "Guerrilla Warfare and Ideological Confrontation in the Arabian Peninsula: The Rebellion in Dhufar," *World Affairs*, Vol. 139, No. 4 (Spring 1977), pp. 278-295. Other key sources include Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, pp. 304-360; D.L. Price, "Oman: Insurgency and Development," *Conflict Studies*, No. 53 (Jan. 1975); and John Townsend, *Oman: The Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 95-112. See also the reminiscences by British officers involved in the fighting: Ranulph Fiennes, *Where Soldiers Fear to Tread* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975); K. Perkins, "Oman 1975: The Year of Decision," *JRUSI*, Vol. 124, No. 1 (Mar. 1979), pp. 38-45; Tony Jeapes, *SAS: Operation Oman* (London: William Kimber, 1980); and John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman, 1965-1975* (London: Michael Russell, 1983).

Peninsula were wafting across even the isolated Dhufari mountains as Sa'id b. Taymur refused to countenance any change.

In 1962, a group of disgruntled *jibalis* – mountain tribesmen speaking a South Arabic language – made their way to Saudi Arabia where they met the leaders of the old imamate and then to Iraq where a training base for Dhufari rebels was established and sporadic raids were carried out in Dhufar during 1963 and 1964. A more organized approach to dissidence began in 1964 when the Dhufar Liberation Front (DLF) was formed out of a merger between the Dhufar branch of the Arab Nationalists' Movement (ANM), the Dhufar Benevolent Society (DBS) and the Dhufari Soldiers' Organization (many of whom had served in the Trucial Oman Scouts). The newly created DLF held its first conference in June 1965 and soon after attacked a government patrol, thus officially launching the revolution. The rebels were occupied in the next few years by small-scale ambushes on the government's Dhufar Force, attempts to gain footholds in the small coastal towns and in the near successful assassination attempt on Sultan Sa'id in April 1966.

At the movement's second congress in September 1968, the Marxists displaced the more moderate nationalists in the DLF's leadership and changed its name to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG; later slightly changed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf). The establishment of an office in Aden signalled the strong ties between the PFLOAG and the NLF regime in South Yemen. With new sources of support assured, the guerrilla campaign was stepped up and gradually PFLOAG control was extended throughout the western part of the province. Positions along the road from Salala to Thamarit (in the desert behind the mountains) were attacked in early May 1969 and finally Rakhyut, the major town in the west, was overrun in August 1969.

The rest of 1969 and early 1970 saw the extension of the fighting to Thamarit road and Salala Plain, including mortar attacks on the RAF's base at Salala. The Jabal Samhan region of eastern Dhufar gradually slipped under guerrilla control and effective government authority was reduced to Salala Plain, where barbed-wire perimeter fences were built around the few remaining coastal towns under sultanate authority, and the desert behind the mountains.

The PFLOAG's success encouraged similar groups elsewhere in Oman. In June 1970, an offshoot named the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf launched mortar attacks on army camps in central Oman and prompted the various groups plotting the overthrow of Sultan Sa'id to push their timetable forward. After a brief gunbattle in Sa'id's Salala palace in July 1970, the sultan was persuaded to abdicate in favor of his son Qabus and leave the country. The new sultan's concern for Dhufar ran deep: his mother was of *jibali* origin and he himself was born and raised in Dhufar. Consequently, one of his first acts was to pardon surrendering rebels, which attracted many of the "tribal" or nationalist dissidents but was spurned by the ideologues. At the same time, a comprehensive "hearts and minds" campaign was launched to build roads, schools, health facilities and wells, under the administration of new Civil Action Teams.

At the same time, the sultanate made use of its financial reserves, which had been steadily accumulating since oil exports began in 1968, to launch a sustained military offensive. Defense expenditure quickly rose to nearly 50% of the national budget as investments were made in British fighters, transport planes, naval patrol craft, and American helicopters. The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) was overhauled and enlarged, and the heavy ratio of Baluch over Arab ranks was reversed.

After years of defensive action, the SAF finally moved forward in early 1971, bombing rebel positions in the west and taking over parts of Jabal Samhan. Still, the SAF offensive was forced to retreat before the annual monsoon and it was not until October 1971 that the Leopard Line was built along the perimeters of Jabal Samhan to cut off supply routes.

This constituted the first phase in a policy of containment, whereby the SAF constructed a number of "lines," consisting of a series of fortified positions linked by barbed-wire fences and frequent patrols. The intention was to divide the province into isolated sectors: when one area was cleared of rebel activity, the sector to its west would then be isolated and cleared. A similar tactic, Operation Simba, undertaken in May 1972, was an attempt to seal off the border with the PDRY; the effort proved premature, however.

With the SAF closedown during the 1972 monsoon season, PFLOAG forces moved back into the mountains, including Jabal Samhan. At this time, the guerrillas launched what was to be their last forward thrust: a rocket attack on Salala which produced a direct hit on the officers' mess at the air base. The rebel drive was thwarted, however, by the failure of twin assaults on the coastal towns of Mirbat and Taqa in July. The PFLOAG's failure to capture the eastern coastal strip marked the military turning point of the war. From then on, the rebels were steadily pushed back. Operations in the east were reduced to hit-and-run tactics and the rocket barrages of Salala Plain had ceased by October 1973.

Attempts to extend the scope of the revolt by opening a second front in the north were failures. Some 80 dissidents were rounded up in Muscat in December 1973 and an attempt to disrupt National Day celebrations in November 1974 was foiled when a Land-Rover was stopped near Muscat after a brief shoot-out and interrogation led to other conspirators. Meanwhile, the fighting in Dhufar was characterized by rebel setbacks. Even though Operation Simba was not as successful as had been hoped, it resulted in the establishment of the Mainbrace Line, a set of fortified mountaintop positions centered on the border post at Sarfayt and overlooking the strip of wooded hills between the seacoast and the desert. The SAF's success in maintaining Mainbrace during the 1972 monsoon season despite constant siege by the rebels meant that valuable time was not lost in the autumn by recapturing positions abandoned the previous spring.

By early spring 1973, government troops had begun to capture keypoints in the western Jabal Qamar and naval craft stepped up surveillance of the rebel-held coastline. It was clear by this time that the sultanate had gained the upper hand in the rebellion. Not only was SAF able to mobilize 3500 troops and some 45 aircraft against a rebel total of approximately 2000 hardcore insurgents but Sultan Qabus had been notably successful in mobilizing outside support, including combat troops from Iran. Iranian paratroopers were key elements in Operation Thimble of December 1973, when the Thamarit road was recovered and permanently held open, providing the ground link between Muscat and Salala in several years.

Subsequent SAF activity was directed towards clearing central Dhufar from enemy control. In early 1974, the Hornbeam Line was built as a major part of this strategy. Stretching inland for nearly 50 miles from Mughsayl on the coast and roughly 20 miles west of the Thamarit road, the Hornbeam Line was the most ambitious of the government lines. Its purpose was to severely restrict supply convoys, including camel trains, from reaching the area to its east. Thus the line divided Dhufar into a largely government-controlled area to the east and a smaller no-man's land to the west, while government forces used the remainder of the spring to attack guerrilla positions in Jabal

QaMar. The rapidly crumbling position of the rebels resulted in an inconclusive overture to the Arab League for mediation and then a split between the Dhufari members of the front and the Gulf members – the truncation of the movement's name to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) reflected the decision to concentrate military activity on Oman alone.

Following the 1974 monsoon season, the sultanate accelerated its military offensive by engaging in heavy fighting around Sarfayt. By December, the Hammer Line had been built to the west of Hornbeam. Iranian participation in this offensive was complemented by the combined Omani-Iranian assault on Rakhyut in January 1975, and the town was captured at a heavy cost in Iranian lives. Following this success, the Damavand Line was built from Rakhyut northward, bisecting the strip between the Hornbeam Line and the border and thus forcing the rebels into an even smaller operating area.

The government's final push began at the close of the 1975 monsoon season when SAF and Iranian troops moved into areas north of Rakhyut. Other Iranian contingents moved south from Sarfayt towards the sea while the PFLO base at Hawf in South Yemen was attacked by sultanate aircraft. The offensive became a rout by late November as Omani troops occupied the final villages in western Dhufar, unopposed by the rebels who had slipped back into the PDRY. On 11 December 1975, Sultan Qabus officially declared that the Dhufar war was over.

Despite scattered shelling from across the border, the downing of a helicopter carrying the commander of the SAF's Dhufar Brigade and the PFLO's insistence that the rebellion would be carried on, the end had apparently come to over a decade of fighting. Increasing numbers of rebels turned themselves in to the government, with the total number of surrendered reaching 275 in February 1976. Yet, despite all this, the PFLO refused to fold completely, its leaders defiant and its propaganda outlets in South Yemen claiming continued fighting. Relations between conservative Oman and Marxist South Yemen remained hostile until an agreement on exchanging diplomats and demarcating their common border was reached in 1983, with the help of Kuwait and the UAE.

Much of the sultanate's success in the rebellion was the result of assistance marshalled from the outside, and chief among the external supporters was Britain. Although the British had been largely excluded from activity or movement in Dhufar by the cautiousness of Sa'īd b. Taymur, the sultan eventually had been forced to call on the British-officered SAF for help there. British casualties were reported in the fighting as early as 1966. By April 1971, there were 49 seconded British officers serving with the SAF, along with another 71 on private contract and 60 pilots.⁵¹ By the end of the rebellion in 1975, the British presence had grown to 700, including 220 officers on private contract, 60 Special Air Service (SAS) members, 75 men from the Royal Engineers, and 147 RAF personnel at Salala Air Base.⁵² Officially, casualties were stated to be 11 killed in action and 18 wounded, but it was rumored that the SAS toll alone had included 73 deaths.⁵³

The role of SAS in Dhufar was long denied, even though the regiment's ties with Oman stretched back to the successful Anglo-Omani assault on al-Jabal al-Akhdar in January 1959 and had

⁵¹*The Economist*, 3 Apr. 1971.

⁵²*The Times*, 9 Dec. 1975.

⁵³*The Observer*, 11 Jan. 1976.

been kept current by several training exercises during the following decade. In fact, an SAS squadron had been posted to Dhufar in 1970 under the cover of British Army Training Team (BATT), although this was not officially acknowledged until much later. Continuing reports of SAS casualties in 1972 and afterwards failed to draw Whitehall's confession of combat roles even through early 1974. Nevertheless, these elite troops contributed heavily to eventual victory.

In addition to personnel, the sultanate relied heavily on British equipment and weapons. An order was placed in April 1968 for Jet Provost trainer aircraft, in September 1970 for 5 Skyvan transport planes, with more ordered in September 1971, followed by an order for a dozen Strikemaster fighters and various naval patrol craft. The culmination of these purchases came in late 1974 when the sultanate contracted for 12 Anglo-French Jaguar fighters and 28 rapier missiles, at a cost of between £71 and £83 million. British interests were also present in commercial activities in Dhufar, such as port construction at Raysut, roadbuilding, banking and communications.

There were also important contributions from Oman's neighbors. The Shah of Iran was more than willing to assist in putting down a Marxist uprising – particularly one that had received considerable support from China and the Soviet Union – and he was encouraged in this move by Washington under the Nixon Doctrine. Dhufar also presented the Shah with a rare opportunity to provide combat training for his troops, and the rapid rotation of Iranians fighting in Dhufar was alleged to have resulted in nearly 200 deaths. Iranian helicopters and paratroopers were sent to Dhufar in early 1973 and by the end of 1974 Iranian troops totalled over 2000, growing to over 5000 in 1975. A local headquarters was established at the sprawling air base at Thamarit and Iranian F-5 Phantoms patrolled the PDRY border while Iranian destroyers shelled the rebel-held Dhufari coast. The Iranians were at the center of Rakhyut's capture in January 1975 and they played a prominent role in the "big push" in December.⁵⁴

The termination of the Dhufar rebellion allowed Britain in 1976 to abandon its final military installations in the Middle East, the RAF bases at Salala and on Masira Island. Nevertheless, the British influence in Oman remained strong, particularly in the military where British officers outnumbered Omani officers as late as 1982. It was not until 1985 that Omanis began to replace the seconded British commanders of the sultanate's land forces, air force, and navy. US attempts to gain the military cooperation of the Gulf states in its RDF planning were best received in Oman, where ironically the British presence remained the strongest and at times British advisers appeared to resent the growing ties between Oman and the US.

⁵⁴Iranian involvement in Dhufar was viewed with suspicion by most other Arab states, including Oman's neighbors in the Gulf. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia and the UAE provided the sultanate with welcome financial assistance while Jordan contributed staff officers and NCOs, intelligence officers, engineer units and a combat battalion briefly in 1975.

Table 3.1. Summary of RAF Air Operations at Aden, 1940-1949

Date	Against	Action Taken ①	Casualties
Jan. 1940	Bayhan and Wadi Markha district	O	None
Apr. 1940	Qutaybi tribe	O	None
May 1940	Bin Abdat of al-Ghurfa	G	Unknown
May 1940	Irqa district	W	None
Mar. 1941	Depose and replace sultan at Shuqra	G	Unknown
June 1941	Shooting incident at Say'un	O	Unknown ②
July 1941	Imam's forces occupying Dar al-Bayda	B	None
Nov. 1941	Bayhan tribe	W ③	None
Mar. 1942	Abyan district	O	None
Mar. 1945	Surrender of Bin Abdat	B	Unknown
Jan. 1946	Western Subayhi tribe	W	None
Feb.-Mar. 1946	Fadli tribe	G	None
May-Sep. 1946	Amiri-Shayri dispute	O	None
Oct. 1946	Hawshabi-Dhambari dispute	W	None
Nov. 1946	Amiri-Shayri dispute	O	None
Apr. 1947	Ahmadi tribe	B	None ④
July 1947	Bal Harith tribe	B	1 RAF pilot; opposing casualties unknown
Nov. 1947	Qutaybi tribe	B	None
Feb. 1948	Bal Harith tribe	B	None
June 1948	Hujayli tribe	B	None
Aug. 1948	Saqladi tribe	B	1 RAF pilot killed and 1 navigator wounded; number of opposing casualties unknown
Oct. 1948	Mansuri tribe	B	None
Aug.-Sep. 194	Imam's forces	B	None

NOTES:

- ① O = Overflight or no action taken; B = Bombing carried out; G = action taken in support of ground forces; W = warnings dropped only.
- ② Only casualties incurred as result of fighting between local parties.
- ③ After delivery of ultimatum by air, tribe agreed to demolition of 2 forts by RAF landing party.
- ④ Action taken after British Political Officer was killed by tribesmen and his escort in turn killed several Ahmadis; apparently only material damage done to village when it was destroyed by aerial bombing.

SOURCES:

- ① AIR/24/2; Air Staff, AHQ, Aden: Operations Record Book (1940-1943).
- ② AIR/2/4, Air Staff, AHQ Aden: Operations Record Book (1944-1945).
- ③ AIR/2/10483, Aden Protectorate: Punitive Bombing Against Recalcitrant Tribes (1942-1949).

