End of Empire policies, and the politics of local elites: The British exit from South Arabia and the Gulf, 1951-1972.

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Abbreviations and Conventions

AA	Aden Association
ADDF	Abu Dhabi Defence Force
APL	Aden Protectorate Levies
ATUC	Aden Trade Union Congress
CCOC	Conservative Commonwealth and Overseas Council
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CO	Colonial Office
CRD	Conservative Research Department
EAP	Eastern Aden Protectorate
FCB	Fabian Colonial Bureau
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FLN	Front de la Libération Nationale
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of South Yemen
FO	Foreign Office
FRA	Federal Regular Army
GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
LegCo	Legislative Council
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NLF	National Liberation Front
PO	Political Officer
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
RAF	Royal Air Force
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SAL	South Arabian League
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UNF	United National Front
WAP	Western Aden Protectorate

Abstract I

The unusual way in which Britain's empire in Arabia was connected politically and constitutionally to the metropole, and the perceived – in some instances exaggerated – view of its strategic and economic importance, created both an opportunity and a justification for the British disengagement from the region to happen differently than in most of the rest of the empire. Strong personalities – in the metropole, amongst the men on the spot, and among local elites – played a crucial role in decision-making, and this thesis argues that informal networks from among these three constituencies worked in parallel to the established formal channels, impacting policy and driving the decision-making process. These networks initially contributed to a break in the political consensus within the metropole, but eventually also helped to restore it. The manipulation of local elites was the tool of choice, used by Britain (under both Conservative and Labour Governments) and its "men on the spot", in their endeavour to secure a lasting privileged position in Arabia. How key actors adapted to change, both in their own societies and in the international system, often determined the success or otherwise of their endeavours.

This tangled tale of Britain's last imperial stand in Arabia is far from being a unique case of how modern empires have handled unusual episodes of imperial retreat. The story has echoes in two other imperial exits of the late 20th century – the French disengagement from Algeria from 1954 to 1962, and Russian efforts to maintain a privileged position in Georgia, immediately before and after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and since. Even if it is too early to draw firm conclusions, similar patterns – as the ones discussed in this thesis with regards to the end of the British Empire in Arabia – can also be observed in the other two cases, allowing us to draw some observations and lessons.

Abstract 2

This thesis discusses the unusual way in which Britain relinquished its imperial role in Arabia in the 1960s.

The peculiar arrangements through which Britain's empire in Arabia was connected politically and constitutionally to the metropole, and the perceived – in some instances exaggerated – view of its strategic and economic importance, created both an opportunity and a justification for the British disengagement from the region to happen differently than in most of the rest of the empire.

Chapter 1 explains the nature of this relationship, and the grey areas that it created with regard to Britain's rights, duties and responsibilities, in territories stretching across the Eastern and Southern rims of the Arabian Peninsula. The ambiguity of the relationship of the metropole with the territories – except for Aden, which was a Crown Colony – created an opportunity for the process of end of empire to be done differently. This was justified by the perceived importance of the region for the metropole's economic and strategic interests. The global and regional context made this a challenging task.

There was broad agreement within the British establishment, including in the leadership of the two main political parties, that maintaining a privileged position in the region after the formal end of empire was important, mainly for economic and financial reasons. There was however less agreement on the usefulness of the region in military and strategic terms. The decision of the Conservative Government, after the Suez crisis, to turn Aden into the main centre for projecting British military power in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, instead of securing the objective of retaining a privileged position, seriously jeopardised it.

Strong personalities – in the metropole, amongst the men on the spot, and among local elites – played a crucial role in decision-making, and this thesis argues that informal networks from among these three constituencies worked in parallel to the established formal channels, impacting policy and sometimes driving the decision-making process.

The tightly knit group of men who managed British interests in the region were mainly Arabists, who shared similar education and career backgrounds. Their orientalist thinking is examined in Chapter 2 through the writings of three of the most prominent of them: William Luce, Charles Johnston and Kennedy Trevaskis. Of all the "men on the spot" in Arabia in the period from 1951-1972 Luce and Trevaskis were the ones whose actions determined most the outcome of British policy and strategy. They continued to play a role in influencing British policy in the region long after their retirement from public service. Trevaskis' romantic attachment to the idea of empire, and his obsession with "nipping trouble in the bud" determined the way that Britain handled its exit from Aden and South Arabia. His personal friendship with Conservative politicians Julian Amery and Duncan Sandys enabled him to exert influence on government policy, but his tactics left no space for moderate nationalists in South Arabia and contributed to the breakdown of a bi-partisan approach to the region in the metropole. On the other hand, Luce's more pragmatic and flexible approach contributed to a smoother and more successful transition in the Gulf. Luce used his connections with the Conservative Party to help restore political consensus on the region within the metropole.

The manipulation of local elites was the tool of choice, used by Britain (under both Conservative and Labour Governments) and its "men on the spot", in their endeavour to secure a lasting privileged position in Arabia. These elites were mainly the Sheikhly and Sultanic families that traditionally provided the rulers in the area. A range of soft and hard power tools ranging from tea with the Queen to outright deposition were employed as means

of exerting British power and influence, as the thesis discusses in Chapter 3. Deposition was the ultimate tool of sanction, and whilst this was initially used against rulers whose actions were perceived to be unfriendly to Britain, by the 1960s this was also being used against loyal friends of Britain who were, however, perceived to be an obstacle to Britain's transition strategy. This is discussed with reference to six cases of deposition in this period.

After WWII new elites from outside the ruling families emerged. The merchants of Bahrain, Dubai and Aden formed an embryonic middle-class in the region, but showed little appetite to engage with politics. Conversely workers movements in Bahrain and Aden became politicised and radicalised very quickly and presented the first serious challenge to the British position and its alliance with the traditional ruling families. Chapter 4 discusses how the British took a different approach to the establishment of trade unions in Bahrain and Aden. The Aden TUC was initially well-regarded by the colonial administration, who created the conditions for it to flourish under the auspices of the British TUC. Within a short period of time, however, ATUC became the nemesis of British colonial power in Aden, despite the fact that its tactics were until the early 1960s largely peaceful. Whilst the Colonial government in Aden was busy decapitating the moderate nationalist leadership in Aden Colony and Protectorate, a much more radical and sinister movement emerged, as if from nowhere, forcing Britain into an inelegant retreat.

The retreat from Aden in 1967, and the final withdrawal East of Suez caused a rift within the British political establishment, breaking the traditional consensus on foreign and imperial policy, right at the end of empire. This was partly due to the strong influence of those within the Conservative government, and later in opposition, who regretted the imperial decline and wanted to make a last stand in Aden. Their obsession with the Nasserist threat, and a desire to restore British prestige in the Middle East after the debacle of Suez, meant that they pursued their efforts with a messianic fervour. The thesis examines the relationship

between Trevaskis and two key Conservative politicians, Julian Amery and Duncan Sandys, and how an informal network around these three impacted British policy. It questions the role played by the Cabinet, and the Cabinet Committee system in providing the necessary political oversight for events in South Arabia in the period leading up to 1964. The Labour Government was left with few options on Aden once it assumed power. It was also initially weakened by a small majority in Parliament and disagreements within the centre of government on Britain's role in the world. Eventually, however, emboldened by a second election victory it moved decisively to refocus priorities, abandoning the base in Aden and later starting the process of withdrawal East of Suez, focusing instead on securing a lasting privileged commercial and economic position for Britain in the Gulf. These decisions were taken based on pragmatic considerations, and a new consensus developed around them by the end of the decade.

This tangled tale of Britain's last imperial stand in Arabia is far from being a unique case of how modern empires have handled unusual episodes of imperial retreat. The story has echoes in two other imperial exits of the late 20th century – the French disengagement from Algeria from 1954 to 1962, and Russian efforts to maintain a privileged position in Georgia, immediately before and after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and since. Even if it is too early to draw firm conclusions, similar patterns – as the ones discussed in this thesis with regards to the end of the British Empire in Arabia – can also be observed in the other two cases, allowing us to draw some observations and lessons.

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My wish to research and write this thesis developed during a decades-long journey through that great source of learning, the "university of life", spent mostly working and travelling in the Caucasus, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. I was often struck by how in the late 20th century the great European empires tried to hold on to some of their possessions in these regions, even whilst in full retreat from elsewhere, and how this had impacted the countries that subsequently emerged. I was intrigued by why and how this happened, as well as by similarities in what at first appeared to be completely different circumstances.

For the last three years, at Oxford University, through study, research and analysis I sought to answer some of these questions, at least as they related to the British exit from the Arabian Peninsula in the 1950s and the 1960s. It has been an intense, exciting and fulfilling exercise. I would like to thank the members and staff of the History Faculty, and the Master and Members of St Peter's College, for providing the academic framework and institutional home for my time in oxford whilst writing the thesis. I am truly grateful to Dr James McDougall of Trinity College, Oxford, who supervised my thesis with a wonderful mix of rigour, tact, and friendliness, and who was a constant fountain of knowledge on many different aspects of my research. This work owes much to him.

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Introduction: Empires in retreat and the limits of imperial policy

Britain's empire in the Middle East was distinct by the nature of its formal political and constitutional relationship with the metropole. Only Aden, belatedly, was ever made a Crown Colony. Arrangements with the rest were, to borrow an expression from Gallagher and Robinson, 'informal' if possible and 'formal' if necessary. What remained of it at the end of the 1950s were the territories in South Arabia and around the Persian Gulf, which had been held within the British sphere for a century and more through a mix of gunboat diplomacy and scores of treaties negotiated with local chiefs, some of whom were rulers of substantial polities, such as the Sultan of Muscat, others mere village heads. It was an archaic arrangement suitable for the 19th century, but hardly ideal in the global and regional contexts in which the process of bringing the territories to independence played out in the 1950s and the 1960s. Yet the unusual arrangements also provided an opportunity, and British politicians and officials exploited this in order to extend Britain's hegemony for as long as possible, and to secure for the metropole a long-lasting privileged position. There was, within the British establishment, a broad consensus, on what British interests in the region were, but considerable disagreement as to how they could be achieved. At a time of political turmoil and deep-rooted societal changes, of which 'end of empire' was both a cause and a reflection, tactics overshadowed objectives, creating rifts within the British polity.

Two men, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis and Sir William Luce, played a determining role in forming and executing British policy towards South Arabia and the Persian Gulf towards the end of British rule, and they continued influencing policy and opinion even after they retired from public service. Foreign and Colonial Office deference to their "orientalist" skills

increased their significance. In the case of Trevaskis, his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP), his strong personality, and his proximity to key players in the Conservative Government, contributed to increasing the weight of his views to the point where they became official policy. This reflected flaws in the culture of government**.** A system that had given Governors of Colonies (and their equivalents), "the men on the spot", a free hand in decision-making may have suited the circumstances pre-WWII, but by the 1960s, with the advent of communications and global media reach, events "on the spot" resounded in both national politics and in the international arena faster and more significantly than ever before. Furthermore, to succeed, Trevaskis' attempt at "friendly state-building" in South Arabia required a substantial and long-term financial contribution, a commitment to use extensive military force, and the use of dubious practices of anti-insurgency methods. Britain in the 1960s, under any government, was not ready for any of this. As Fredrick Cooper argues in his essay, "Empires Multiplied", 'The British polity would accept neither a financially and morally encumbering military struggle against colonial nationalists nor the cost of bringing about social justice in an empire wide British polity'[1]. On the other hand, Luce's more pragmatic approach in the Trucial States, under tighter Foreign Office scrutiny, recognised early the need for flexibility and for adapting to a changing global and regional environment, whilst keeping the overall final objective continuously in mind.

It was mainly through shifts in its interaction with the local elites that Britain sought to protect its interests in the region at this time. As Burbank and Cooper point out, 'Most often imperial rulers needed the skills, knowledge and authority of people from a conquered society – elites who could gain from co-operation or people who had earlier been marginalised and who could see advantages in serving the victorious power.'[2] It is possible to read British engagement with local elites in the Gulf and South Arabia 'in typical empire

[1] Cooper (2004), p255.
[2] Burbank and Cooper *(*2010), p14.

script: finding agents and intermediaries within rivals' camps.'[3] But the process of elite engagement and manipulation in the context being looked at was also extraordinarily detailed and nuanced. Both Trevaskis and Luce used this tool with vigour, not in the process of imperial advance, but in that of imperial retreat. In doing so, both were ruthless if necessary, but Luce comes across as more cautious and calculating: Trevaskis 'nipping trouble in the bud'[4], Luce acting with 'firmness tempered with sympathy and humour'[5]. The manipulation of local elites is discussed with special reference to the removal of local traditional leaders in Lahej (1958), Lower Yafa (1959), Sharjah (1965), Abu Dhabi (1966), Oman (1970) and Qatar (1972), as well as in the context of the attitude of the British administration to new elites such as trade union leaders.

In Aden and South Arabia, Britain decapitated the moderate leadership of the nationalist movement, belatedly installed an alien and unwelcome military base on top of an already tense situation, and sought to impose political frameworks that suited its interests rather than those of the territory. The result was failure all around – a victory for extremists, and the only communist state to ever exist in the Arab world. If Britain sought a privileged position post-empire it certainly did not achieve it in South Arabia. On the other hand, the approach in the Persian Gulf was more cautious, with local sensibilities understood and managed better. The local elites were eventually left to work out a solution between themselves. Britain's own objectives were more modest – it was no longer an empire and it did not require imperial outposts; it remained an important global economic force and it saw the Gulf from this new perspective. The three successful states that emerged at the end: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar are not without their problems, but they certainly have been more successful than the successor state in South Arabia ever was, and Britain

[3] ibid, p378.

[4] It seems that this was based on the thinking in a couplet of the Persian poet Sa'di, often quoted to Trevaskis by his father: "The spring at its source may be turned by a twig. When it has grown into a river it cannot be crossed by an elephant" (Trevaskis, 1968, p53).

[5] Parsons (1994), page xviii.

remains a privileged partner in all three, although over time this partnership has weakened. The personalities of Luce and Trevaskis contributed substantially to determining this outcome.

Personalities also impacted decision-making in the metropole in this period of change. From 1951 to 1972, Britain had seven Prime Ministers, ten Foreign Secretaries, nine Colonial Secretaries and twelve Defence Secretaries[6]. To balance this brevity in office by the politicians, the civil service provided the continuity, with only two Cabinet Secretaries serving in this period[7]. They oversaw an elaborate system of Cabinet Committees that was meant to provide oversight, co-ordination and continuity for government policy. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, this system was flawed, particularly in the period between 1954-64, and this contributed to the failures in South Arabia.

Two influential Conservative politicians played a leading role in events in South Arabia and the Gulf: Duncan Sandys[8], Churchill's son-in-law (until his divorce in 1960), and Julian Amery[9], a founding-member and leading light of the Suez Group[10] and Macmillan's son-in-law. He was also in many ways Sandys' protégée. A factor that has been missed in practically all accounts on the region is the strong personal friendship between Amery and Trevaskis. The two had attended the same public school, Summer Fields in Oxford and their personal friendship lasted a lifetime. The thesis analyses the nature of the Sandys-Amery-Trevaskis relationship, and its impact on British policy and tactics under successive Tory leaderships from Churchill to Douglas-Home.

[6] The post was formally called Minister of Defence until 1964.

[7] Sir Norman Brook (1947-62) and Sir Burke Trend (1963-73).

[8] Sandys was Minister of Supply (1951-54); Minister of Housing and Local Government (1954-57) Minister of Defence (1957-59), Minister of Aviation (1959-60), Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (1960-62) and Secretary of State for Commonwealth and the Colonies (1962-64).

[9] Amery was Under-Secretary of State for War (1957–1958) and for the Colonies (1958–1960). He was then promoted to Secretary of State for Air (1960–1962), followed by a promotion to the post of Minister of Aviation (1962–1964).

[10] For background about the Suez Group see Onslow (1997) pp 108-124.

Edward Heath, as Lord Privy Seal, was the key person dealing with the Trucial States in the early 1960s and took a direct interest in the future of the Persian Gulf when elected Leader of the Conservative Party in 1965. Heath, who as Chief Whip in the previous decade had to battle against revolts by the Suez Group in the House of Commons, was wary of Sandys and Amery and he dropped both from the "front bench" on being elected leader.

On the Labour side there is no equivalent person for whom the region became a personal matter, as seems to have been the case with Amery. Harold Wilson, both in government and in opposition, took a most pragmatic view of Britain's role in the region, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. His first Colonial Secretary was Anthony Greenwood, who served until 23 December 1965, succeeded for short periods by the Earl of Longford and Fred Lee, both of who served only for some weeks each before the post was abolished in August 1966. In any case, on 1 May 1966, responsibility for South Arabia, including Aden, was finally transferred to the Foreign Office. There was uncertainty at the top of the political leadership of the Foreign Office in the first months of the Labour Government since Patrick Gordon-Walker who was earmarked as Foreign Secretary, lost his seat in the 1964 election, but was appointed just the same by Wilson to the post, on the assumption that he will win a by-election in a safe Labour seat that had been hurriedly cleared for him. In January 1965, having managed to lose that seat too, he resigned. Michael Stewart was appointed in his place. He served until August 1966 when he was replaced by George Brown who served until March 1968, thus overseeing the British exit from Aden. Because of Brown's colourful personality, and due to the fact that he was Foreign Secretary in the most dramatic moments of the Aden crisis, he is often credited with responsibility for Labour's policies. However in fact by the time he became Foreign Secretary on this issue there were only details to be resolved, since the main decisions on Aden had already been taken. Stewart returned to the helm of the Foreign Office after Brown, and remained until the end of the first Wilson

Ministry. Stewart was, and remains, a relatively unknown politician. He was a "safe pair of hands" who helped reconcile Labour policies with those of the establishment. There was much more continuity in Labour's leadership of the Ministry of Defence with Denis Healey serving as Secretary of State throughout the whole life of the first Wilson Government. Healey was to the centre in politics and more acceptable to the establishment, unlike Greenwood, who was considered to be on the left of the party and was committed to issues such as nuclear disarmament. Two junior ministers also played a role momentarily in the Aden story. Lord Beswick, the son of a Nottingham miner who served as a pilot in the RAF during WWII, was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office from 11 October 1965 to 1 August 1966. He tried to create a niche for himself around the Aden question and ended up being given the thankless task of announcing to the Federation leaders the news of the fast and complete British disengagement as a consequence of the 1966 Defence White Paper. The other one was Lord Shackleton, the younger son of the explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, who as a Minister without Portfolio in 1967 was sent as Minister-in-residence in Aden to oversee the final stages of disengagement.

Britain's messy exit from South Arabia in 1967 is often attributed to a confused policy of the Wilson Government. Certainly until the 1966 election the Wilson Government struggled to come to grips with a number of national and international issues. This thesis argues, however, that failures in the decision-making process in the decade prior to the 1964 Labour victory left the new Government with little room for manoeuvre, a situation further aggravated by economic pressures in the run up to the devaluation of sterling. The thesis challenges a widely held belief that left wing solidarity had determined decision-making on the part of the Labour Government, particularly in South Arabia, and argues that the previous policy pursued by British officials in Aden had already created an impossible situation, which the incoming Labour government struggled to manage.

In contrast, the policy pursued by Britain in the Persian Gulf in the 1960s, reflected wider national realities, and a reassessment of national objectives and priorities. After 1968, a new consensus emerged within the British establishment on Britain's role in the world, and specifically in the Gulf. The policy pursued by the Labour Government survived, largely intact, the change of government in 1970. It was carried through to its natural conclusion by the Heath government in December 1971.

In conclusion, the thesis discusses the extent to which there are patterns in the way empires manage imperial retreat, especially from those areas that are somehow considered vital for the future of the metropole, by comparing the British exit from the Arabian Peninsula in the 1960s with similarities in the French decolonisation of North Africa (1954-1962) and the Russian disengagement from the South Caucasus (1989-1999). The three empires tried to the end to manage change, and influence the post-imperial order. Their success in doing so was however, modest.

Managing change at the end of empires.

The thesis looks at how the key players adapted to the many changes at the global, regional and national level, and how they themselves became agents, opponents or victims of change. Managing change required flexibility – and whilst this is often incorrectly confused with indecision or confusion, it did result in inconsistency.

World War II was a seismic event in modern global history and changed all the certainties that underpinned international order. In the British metropole, even though the monarchy remained intact, and even increased in popularity to remain the symbol of Britain in all its dimensions, and even though not an inch of the British mainland was ever occupied during the war, the changes in society, politics, economics, and any other sphere one can imagine were profound. Kurt Lewin, the father of 'Change Management Theory', who was

developing his ideas at this time, referred to three phases of the process of managing change: unfreezing – change – refreezing.[11]

The "unfreezing" in the international order brought about by WWII was complete, and occurred over a short period of time, and its effects reverberated through the four corners of the huge "British World". The new reality that emerged after WWII was soon to impact every British territory, large or small[12]. That change was necessary, to deal with the new situation, including in the relationship between the centre and the components of empire, which was obvious to most, yet some thought cosmetic changes would be enough. As Darwin argues, British politicians felt they could live with constitutional changes within the empire as long as the territories affected could remain within the British global system 'strategically dependent on Britain, economically complementary to Britain, and culturally under its influence….So long as constitutional change made no difference to these fundamentals, British policy makers were able to regard it as an inconvenient, sometimes distasteful, necessity, but not of over-riding importance.'[13]

[11] Theories of change management evolved throughout the second half of the 20th century as the events described in this thesis unfolded. Kurt Lewin, a German Jew and a refugee from Nazism, is often cited as 'the intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioural science, action research and planned change' (Schein, 1988, p239). He visualised change in three stages: Stage 1: Unfreezing – a process through which the established equilibrium is destabilised (unfrozen), and the old habits unlearnt; Stage 2 Moving – the process of making things differently. Here, Lewin warns that attempts to predict, or identify a specific outcome, from planned change, is very difficult because of the many different forces at play. Instead, one should seek to take into account all the forces at work, and identify and evaluate on a trial and error basis all the available options, until a broad consensus is reached. Lewin recognises that without re-enforcement, change can in this situation be short-lived.; Stage 3 Re-freezing in the new situation. This, however, has to be realistically close to, and in harmony, with the broad environment, for otherwise the new situation can unravel very quickly (Lewin, 1947). Lewin insists that the behaviour of individuals in this process is underpinned by the broader group environment (the field), which is itself constantly changing, although not always at the same speed. Lewin claims that what makes a group 'is not the similarity or dissimilarity of individuals' but 'interdependence of fate' (Lewin, 1939, p165). Lewin emphasises the importance of as much consensus as possible, in order for any change to take root, and not be itself subject very soon to a process of unfreezing. (For a detailed discussion of Kurt Lewin's work and theories see Burnes, 2009, p134-157).

[12] Lawson (2010) pp51-3, says that in Bahrain WWII brought with it a tighter central government control of society, including rationing and internment whilst also provoking societal reactions in the form of hoarding, a black-market, and workers withdrawing their labour at the port and the refinery.

[13] Darwin (2001) p 4.

However, as Russian statesman Yevgeny Primakov put it somewhat graphically with regard to the Soviet Union, once the process of separation had started, 'the knife of disintegration could not help cutting the living organism'.

A note on methodology and terms.

A wide-angle approach has been adopted throughout the thesis – seeking to place the personalities and events discussed within the wider context – whilst often zooming in on particular events and individual characters to highlight their role, importance and significance. In doing so, contradictions between the wider processes and individual actions, are highlighted. This approach has required that some issues be discussed in detail and others with a broad-brush.

The thesis takes as its start point 1951, the year when newly arrived colonial administrators in Aden re-energised the "forward policy"[14] in the colony's hinterland, and ends in 1972 with the palace coup in Qatar, and the assassination of the Ruler of Sharjah by his predecessor, who had been deposed by the British in 1965. It excludes any detailed discussion of events in Kuwait, and of the insurgency in Oman, although references are made to both where appropriate.

The term "Arabia" is often used in this thesis to describe the Arabian Peninsula and the territories within it. It is a term that is used often in the historiography, as well as in the archives. The Foreign Office called its department dealing with the area "The Arabian Department", and the embryonic state created from Aden and the protectorates was called the Federation of South Arabia. The term is used less in contemporary literature and discourse.

[14] A process first started in the Eastern Aden Protectorate before WWII, but which was soon extended to the Western Protectorate. In the 1950s it was re-energised and took the form of extending British rule through "Advisory Treaties" and through federating the WAP entities.

The term "Persian Gulf" was used widely until 1971, including in official documents. It has since become politically incorrect. Attempts to rebrand the area as the "Arabian Gulf" have been equally unsatisfactory. The more neutral term "Gulf" is used whenever possible, although references to the "Persian Gulf" in archive material, and where otherwise appropriate, remain.

The thesis in the context of the historiography.

Researching the end of the British presence on the Arabian Peninsula presents us with a number of challenges. The historiography, though extensive, is rather lopsided. On Aden and South Arabia it is dominated by accounts of serving British political and military officers, and some journalists who covered the "Aden" story when it happened. R.J. Gavin's account[15], written without the benefit of either hindsight or archive material, remains nonetheless refreshingly relevant and full of interesting observations. On the Persian Gulf, all issues connected with the ruling royal families often remain subject to self-imposed censorship by many writers, and official versions of events – such as the overthrow of Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi in 1966, the murder of the Ruler of Sharjah in 1972, and the war in Dhofar in the 1960s, continue to gloss over the facts. Local writers, such as Taryam[16], whilst challenging some of the British narrative, have therefore tended to avoid dealing with the more sensitive issues. There is very little written by the key Arab protagonists of the time; even the articulate leader of ATUC, Abdulla Al-Asnag, has not written his memoirs, 'yet'.

Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and diaries of British politicians, diplomats, soldiers and officials offer important insights to events and the decision-making process. Those writing history from the perspective of their own role in it, invariably have a somewhat distorted view of events. The result is a somewhat awkward body of literature that is more

[15] Gavin, (1967).
[16] Taryam, (1993).

useful to help us understand the mind-set of the writers (many of whom were also key protagonists), but which we need to be careful with when looking for facts and analysis. Fredrick Cooper's warning about pitfalls in recent writing on colonialism, including 'story plucking, leapfrogging legacies, doing history backward and epochal fallacy'[17] needs to be kept well in mind when evaluating the existing historiography.

A second wave of more analytical literature is now trying to catch up. Scholarly writers, such as Paul Dresch and Frauke Heard-Bey offer important and sound accounts of the histories of Yemen[18] and the UAE[19] respectively, but the wide scope of their main works means they have to deal with many issues with a broad perspective. Various other works fill critical gaps in the historiography. Spencer Mawby, Simon C. Smith and James Onley wrote a number of important books and articles on South Arabia and the Gulf. This thesis takes forward in Chapter 2 Mawby's discussion of the role of Orientalism in influencing British policy[20]. A number of academic theses add knowledge on specific elements of the topic. I highlight three, simply for their usefulness in filling gaps on specific areas which this thesis only covers in somewhat general terms: Rosemarie Hollis's thesis[21] flags up important arguments about the increasing importance of the Gulf as a financial player with excess liquidity and how bankers and consultants replaced political officers as the new movers and shakers in the Gulf in the 1970s, an argument that has only increased in importance since she wrote it in 1988; a point also made in Abdulrazak Takriti's thesis[22], which looks at causes of the Dhofar rebellion and the dynamic within the insurgency movement in Muscat and Oman.

[17] Cooper (2004), p 255.
[18] Dresch (2000).
[19] Heard-Bey (1982).
[20] Mawby (2010).
[21] Hollis (1988).
[22] Takriti (2010).

John M. Finlayson's thesis[23] provides very useful close analysis of the work of the Cabinet during the Conservative Governments (1951-64), including on Colonial issues such as Aden.

Gill Bennett, former Chief Historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in her recently published book[24], analyses six major crises in post-WWII British foreign policy – two of which, the Suez Crisis and the withdrawal East of Suez, have a direct bearing on the issues discussed in this thesis. She highlights the importance of factoring in context in the understanding of big decisions that had to be taken during these crises, and the questions that needed to be asked in order to reach a proper understanding of them. Foremost is the role of the United States, which this thesis seeks to address through the use of American archive material, to complement a large body of writing on the topic, including important contributions such as Ritchie Ovendale's "Britain, the United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East 1945-62"[25]. In terms of the domestic context, Gorst and Kelly (eds) collection of essays, "The Suez Crisis"[26] offer an outstanding introduction to the role of personalities, in a global crisis where personalities became a determining factor.

This thesis aims to complement and add to this existing historiography in five ways:

(1) It engages in a critical assessment of the role of key individuals in determining events, policies and outcomes. These include not only the main decision-makers in the metropole, and the local leaders and elites, but also the intermediaries – the officials on the ground who played a crucial role in both formulating and executing policy. It maps out informal, as well as formal connections and networks that cut across the official chain of command. There are plenty of autobiographies, biographies and memoirs of those directly involved in the story from the British side, but they are all carefully written to avoid upsetting

[23] Finlayson (2002).
[24] Bennett (2013).
[25] Ovendale (1996).
[26] Gorst and Kelly (eds) (1997).

colleagues, or running foul of the Official Secrets Act. Balfour-Paul[27] and Hinchcliffe et al.[28] try to be somewhat more comprehensive, but we are still left in no doubt that their account of the story is sanitised. This thesis makes extensive use of archive material, including the large archives of Duncan Sandys and Julian Amery, as well as key protagonists such as Kennedy Trevaskis, Charles Johnston, William Luce, Anthony Greenwood, and others. On the institutional side, the records at the National Archive provide very detailed insights on the decision-making process, even though on some issues, such as the occupation of the islands of Abu Musa and the Two Tunbs by Iran in 1971, and the deposition of rulers on the Trucial Coast in the 1960s, the records remain closed. The archive of the Trades Union Congress and of the Conservative Party have also been analysed, and they yield important additional information from the perspective of two key institutions. The US National Archives provide important insights from an American perspective. The extensive archival work helps fill important gaps in the historiography. This thesis also makes good use of oral history – through interviews conducted directly with some of the surviving players, but also through important, and not as yet often used, resources of oral history archives, available in such places as the British Film Institute and the Imperial War Museum.

(2) It juxtaposes events in South Arabia and the Persian Gulf to assess how British policy was the same, similar, or different, and how the different approaches contributed to different results in the British quest for post-colonial privileged position. The story of South Arabia and the Gulf in most of the literature tends to be told as two separate episodes of history, despite the fact that developments in the two scenarios were taking place in tandem, and the overlap, in terms of both policies and personalities, extensive. Both were also taking place in a very similar wider regional and international geo-political context. This thesis tries to cut through the artificial and somewhat formalistic divide – re-enforced by the official

[27] Balfour-Paul (1994).
[28] Hinchcliffe et al. (2013).

narrative that presents South Arabia as a colonial problem, and the Persian Gulf territories as a defence and foreign policy problem – in an effort to take a more holistic view of British policy and strategy towards the region.

(3) It assesses British manipulation of local elites and its methods, ranging from tea with the Queen to deposition and aerial bombardments, in the case of the traditional rulers, and even more coercive methods when it came to the new elites in the labour movements in Aden and Bahrain. It catalogues the tools available to the "men on the spot" as they tried to safeguard British prestige, and ultimately British influence. Based on rare archive material the thesis maps out a pattern in British action, one that however was not followed blindly, and where action was often preceded by intensive and extensive internal debate within the British decision-making process. Whilst there are individual examinations of cases of deposition in the historiography, for example in Takriti's thesis and in John Beasant's book[29], both of which discuss in detail the deposition of Sultan Said in Oman in 1970, the thesis by comparing six separate case studies from 1958-72 is able to show the extent to which there was a pattern in British action.

(4) It challenges a number of stereotypical perceptions that have become widespread even in the more academic and robust literature connected with the role of the Conservative and Labour governments. There is a very extensive literature on the politics of the period, the foreign, defence and colonial policies pursued by successive governments, and more narrowly on British policy towards the Middle East including Suez, and post Suez. Historians such as Peter Hennessey and David Walker have had to grapple with the widespread belief in some quarters of the British establishment, that Harold Wilson was a leftist fanatic[30]. In the context of British policy in South Arabia and the Gulf two clichés emerged that continue to

[29] Beasant (2002).

[30] D. Walker (1987), p188 says that 'one of the puzzles of Wilson's career is how he continued to be regarded in certain quarters, such as apparently, sections of the security services – as a fanatic' and he accuses Wilson's critics of confusing his statism with socialism. The issue is tackled more directly by Hennessey (2002) p24, and P. Wright (1987) pp362-72.

be repeated often, in both the literature as well as in oral discussions with surviving British and Arab protagonists – the first that the "mess" in Aden and South Arabia was caused by the incompetence of the Wilson Government rather than the impossible position that it had inherited from its predecessor when it came to power in 1964; the second that Labour Government policy was clouded by ideology and solidarity with trade union and left wing groups, which hindered the implementation of plans that involved what is often quaintly referred to as the equivalent of making '17th century Scottish highland chiefs having to work with a modern day Glasgow City Council'.[31] The withdrawal East of Suez is sometimes explained by an ideological aversion to defence expenditure and anti-imperialism within the Cabinet. There is in fact little archival evidence to suggest that vocal Labour Party politics had much impact on events either in Aden or South Arabia or the Persian Gulf. In fact this thesis argues that Conservative Government policy was much more ideologically driven, than was Labour's. Politicians on the fringes argued acrimoniously, and others even in the Cabinet often pandered to them. However a certain broad consensus – what Nicholas Owen calls 'policy settlement consensus' - on what constituted Britain's objectives in the region was in place for most of the time. This consensus whilst shaken in the decade post Suez, especially on tactics rather than aims, was gradually restored in the latter 1960s.

(5) Finally, this thesis tries to explain where the story of Aden, South Arabia and the Persian Gulf sits in the debate on the swing of the colonial pendulum after WWII between those, like David Goldsworthy, who saw the Conservative Governments of Churchill and Eden as trying to manage change and keep it within bounds, and that of Martin Lynn who saw their policy as one of imperial reassertion – a debate masterly summarised by Ronald Hyam who positions himself somewhere in between these two views.[32]

[31] Healey (1989), p281.
[32] Hyam (2006), p168, fn1.

In an important article in the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History in 1984, John Darwin posed the question, "British decolonisation since 1945: A pattern or a puzzle?"[33] Twenty five years later, writing in the same journal, Shohei Sato argued that, in the context of the British decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf, it is both[34]. This thesis, whilst identifying and charting the pattern of British policy and action on the Arabian Peninsula from 1951-72, attempts to resolve the puzzle, arguing that there was much more consistency and continuity in the British approach than is often suggested, and that perhaps there was no puzzle at all – just misperception in some cases caused by deception.

It was during these swings of the pendulum that the seeds that determined British behaviour in Arabia were sown, and from these debates that lessons can be drawn on imperial behaviour in the twilight years of empire, as could also be seen from the end of the French Empire in North Africa, and the end of Soviet power in the South Caucasus several decades later. In all three cases we can see common ingredients: (a) an unusual status/link with the metropole that provides both an opportunity and an excuse for doing things differently; (b) an often inflated perception of the territories' importance for the metropole's own existence, as politicians and officials, as well as the public at large, grappled with concerns on imperial decline, and with the question "where will it all end?"; (c) a period of political turmoil in the metropole, creating unusual conditions where personalities assume particular significance; (d) informal networks that in time of turmoil cut across the formal chain of command; (e) a breakdown in the political consensus, which however does not last long; (f) a pattern of defreezing-change-refreezing as decades-long systems unravel, creating confusion and shuffling all the certainties, but not for long, because soon new systems emerge and take-hold; (g) and finally, how it is often those who manage change best – riding on its wave rather than resisting it – who achieve the best results.

[33] Darwin (1984), pp187-209.
[34] Sato (2009), pp99-117.

Chapter 1. Territories and context, objectives and tactics.

The process of winding up the British Empire happened incrementally over a period of fifty years – starting with the independence of India in 1947 and finishing with the handing over of Hong Kong to China in 1997. The end was never announced formally[35], and for some time the process was slowed down, and there were even those who hoped that it could be reversed. Historians argue about the swing of the colonial pendulum during this period between what Kirk-Greene calls 'the end' and 'the end of the end'[36], yet one is unlikely to find anyone who can claim that by 1960 the process of ending the empire was not ongoing in earnest, or that British policy was not one generally favourable to a swift and orderly withdrawal. As Darwin argues, 'After 1960 the retreat from empire seems too consistent to be accidental, too purposeful to disguise as ulterior imperialism.'[37] Over time Britain developed a routine through which to hand over power, and there was even a checklist of around eighty items that could be ticked off one by one in a bureaucratic manner.[38] Symbolically, as much as legally, the territories were signed off to their new masters at the stroke of midnight on the appointed day, or in the hours after.

The events that unfolded around the British possessions on the Arabian Peninsula after 1960 do not however fit this pattern of imperial retreat. Instead of withdrawing graciously, here there was an attempt to linger on, to meddle deeply in the process of succession, and to try by all means possible to maintain a privileged position in the post-imperial world. What made this region so important for this to happen, and why could it happen here at all?

[35] Harold Macmillan's "Winds of Change" speech to the South African Parliament on 3 February 1960 was probably the closest any British leader ever came to announcing the end of the British Empire.

[36] Kirk-Greene (1999) p90.

[37] Darwin (1984), pp202-3.

[38] Hyam (2006), p399-400 quoting Sir Colin Allan.

After WWII, and even more after the Suez Crisis, the region assumed an importance in the eyes of the British establishment that it had never had before, not even at the height of the empire. This together with the unusual manner in which the territories were linked to the metropole created both a justification, as well as an opportunity, to do things differently. There was a broad consensus within the British establishment of the need to transform Britain's increasingly challenged monopoly of influence and power into a durable privileged position, but there were different views on the tactics that needed to be employed to achieve these objectives, and especially on the time frame. This was part of the larger debate on Britain's role in the world. The Conservative Government, in power until 1964, was committed to maintaining Britain as a global power, which in turn demanded a global military posture. Whilst Harold Wilson was also prone to grand power visions, famously saying that British interests ended on the slopes of the Himalayas, in practice his government adopted a more pragmatic and flexible approach which better reflected the reality of the nation's needs and means within the actual international and regional reality.

1.1 The territories, and a relationship built on gunboats and treaties, as 'informal' as possible, and as 'formal' as necessary.

After the independence of Kuwait in June 1961, what remained of the British empire in the Middle East consisted of the Colony of Aden, the two protectorates that provided its hinterland, and the ostensibly sovereign but protected states of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman and the nine Trucial States north of it.

The colony of Aden had a total area of 75 sq. miles and a population estimated in 1965 at 220,000. The two protectorates had a total area of 111,000 sq. miles and a population estimated at 868,000.[39] The combined population of the nine Trucial States was estimated

[39] The Colonial Office List 1965, pp47-49.

around the same time at 306,000, nearly half of which lived in Bahrain (143,000). The other sizeable communities were in Dubai (60,000), Qatar (45,000) and Abu Dhabi (25,000). The population of the other five were miniscule: Sharjah (15,000), Ras al Khaimah (12,000) Fujairah (3,500), Umm al Quwain (3,000) and Ajman (2,500). They had a combined land area of 29,600 sq. miles, most of which was controlled by Abu Dhabi (26,000 sq. miles). The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman had a population of 550,000 over an area of 82,000 sq. miles.[40]

British interests in the Persian Gulf started early in the 17th century and were spearheaded by the East India Company, which sought to open up the region for trade. It soon entered into conflict with other European and local powers who were already in the area including the Portuguese, the French and the Dutch as well as local Ottoman, Persian and Arab rulers. Its trade with Persia and the riparian communities, was lucrative, though by no means extraordinary, so much so that by the end of the 18th century the company's interest in the region subsided, approximately the same time as Parliament in London started to draw back some of the company's powers.[41] This had a knock on effect of enabling the local Arabs 'to assume a more significant role in the economic and political life of the Persian Gulf.'[42] However this lull was very short-lived for by the beginning of the 19th century, relations were established with the Persian Court, and a Preliminary Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Shah was signed in 1809.

British political influence increased incrementally after that, around the rim of the Arabian Peninsula from Basra to Bab al Mandeb. The Qawasim, a confederation of rulers and their tribes with strongholds in Ras al Khaimah and Sharjah, had emerged as the strongest local power in the Gulf, with a modest navy that conducted raids as far away as the coast of

[40] Fenelon (1967) appendix B and appendix E.

[41] Al-Qasimi (2006) says that 'towards the end of the century the trade of the East India Company was declining and running at a loss' (p27).

[42] Amin (1967), p141.

India. It interfered with British shipping and the Raj eventually sent a military expedition in 1819 that crushed the Qawasim confederation. A "General Treaty "[43] was signed in 1820 – the first of many arrangements that slowly enabled the British to assume in the region a monopoly of power and influence – and of course trade. Soon British power extended over the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, and the coastal territories stretching from it northwards along the western shores of the Persian Gulf and westwards towards the Red Sea. The region became the latest twist to what John A. Gallagher and Ronald E. Robinson, initially in their 1951 article for *The Economic History Review*, characterised as the idea of an empire 'informal' if possible, and 'formal' if necessary.[44] For most of the time, it was held together by Treaty arrangements backed up by Navy gunboats in the 19th century, and the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the 20th century.

By 1947, once India became independent, the task of administering the complex relationship with all the territories in Arabia landed in the lap of the Whitehall bureaucracy. The responsibility for the Gulf States and Muscat and Oman was now with the Foreign Office, as ostensibly these were not colonies but independent states under British protection. The decision to place them under the supervision of the Foreign Office had been hotly debated in Whitehall since some thought that the Colonial Office was better suited to manage these undeveloped entities.[45] Aden remained under the Colonial Office, and the Sultanates of the interior – organised in "Eastern" and "Western" Protectorates – also stayed with the Colonial Office, despite the fact that their nominal status was not much different from the Gulf Sheikhdoms. This was essentially a practical measure since they were only important in

[43] "60. General Treaty Suppressing Piracy and Slave Traffic; Great Britain and the Arab Tribes in the Persian Gulf, 8 January – 15 March 1820", Horewitz (1975), Vol I pp217-9.

[44] Gallagher and Robinson (1953) and (1961)

[45] Peter Tripp, 'Arab States of the Gulf since 1947', an internal report for the FO Arabian Department, 15 December 1966, LUCE G5.

the context of Aden, and the Governor was responsible for managing relations with them.[46] Whilst these archaic arrangements could have been explained, even if not justified, up to WWII, justifying them in the changed world of the 1950s and 1960s became increasingly difficult. The tension between keeping the façade of Britain being, except for Aden, only a protecting power, and the reality of the need to exercise effective control over the internal situation was a constant source of irritation for officials on the ground, and of headache to the government lawyers in London.

In his 1966 valedictory despatch, at the end of his time as Resident in Bahrain, Sir William Luce stated that:

> ...Britain's legal treaty powers in the Gulf are negative, the prevention of external interference either military or political (in the governmental sense), and give her no positive authority to direct the course of events within the states or to determine the nature of their mutual relationships. I have used the qualification "legal" deliberately; we undoubtedly have power to do things which would very materially affect the course of events within individual states and in the area generally, but it has been my experience that even when our responsibilities and the interests of ourselves and our protégés have cried out for the exercise of this power, considerations of legalities and repercussions from such bogeys as the "Committee of Twenty-Four" and "the Voice of the Arabs" have prevailed.[47]

The contradiction is also flagged up by Peter Tripp[48] in his 1966 brief:

> The decision to entrust responsibility to the Foreign Office in effect determined finally and in advance the sort of relationship which would exist between Her Majesty's Government and the Gulf States. Although not recognised at the time it set definite limits to the extent to which Britain would be able to guide the states in their development. These limits were rarely appreciated by successive British administrations and have never been acknowledged either by Britain's allies or her critics in the United Nations and at home. Ministers have occasionally been as baffled as Her Majesty's representatives in the Gulf by Sheikhly refusal to be won over by logical argument. They have overestimated the weight which Sheikhs attached to advice from Her Majesty's Government, especially when this advice conflicted with the Sheikh's own wishes.[49]

[46] Trevaskis points out that this was considered to be 'incongruous and, indeed, offensive by most political conscious Arabs'; Trevaksis (1966), p16.

[47] Sir William Luce, Valedictory Despatch, 18 July 1966. LUCE G2, p4.

[48] Tripp had only recently returned back to the FO in London after a long spell in the Gulf, including stints in Dubai and Bahrain.

[49] Tripp, op cit.

This constitutional melange in many ways left the territories in limbo. The nature of British and French imperialism had started changing during and after WWII, as the British and the French began implementing a new vision for their empires based on development. In Britain there was a general understanding that reform was essential if the empire was to be maintained in some form, and its resources efficiently exploited. The 'Colonial Development and Welfare Act' was widely expanded and funds allocated for a number of development schemes. Assistance was never lavish but usually targeted well enough to create some positive impact. A new policy of educating indigenous elites of the colonies so that they could in the future take part in the administration of their homelands was actively pursued. This policy was far from being altruistic. As David Goldsworthy puts it, post-war British colonial policy reflected very substantial considerations of strategic and economic self-interest. As regards the latter, he adds that 'the early 1950s saw a massive continuation of Labour's efforts to harness colonial commodity production and colonial transactions with the dollar area to the tasks of defending sterling and re-building the domestic economy.'[50] Yet because of the peculiar status of the British territories on the Arabian Peninsula, except Aden, this policy was not considered as being applicable to them.

Yet, despite the fact that in most of the territories abject poverty remained widespread, something had happened to the region that was soon to transform it beyond recognition. By WWII the Gulf region had become a major producer of crude oil, impacting societies across Arabia and greatly increasing British interest in it.

1.2 The territories in the wider regional and international context.

Up to WWII, and even for some years later, the Persian Gulf region and the Arabian Peninsula were essentially a backwater, far from the centre of global attention and relevant

[50] Goldsworthy (1990), p82.

only for their immediate neighbours. Even the advent of oil only changed that slowly. Global and regional developments, however, gradually turned the region into a regional hot spot, an unwelcome status that it retains until the present.

The regional powers, through the sheer size of their territory and population, were and still are Saudi Arabia and Iran. Their importance increased considerably after WWII, as their oil production increased to satisfy global oil consumption. The two countries eyed each other suspiciously across the Gulf. Both were starting to reap the benefit of their oil exports and were to some extent happy that the British were in the Gulf ensuring a certain amount of stability and keeping away unfriendly forces. Both, however, also saw the British as an obstacle to their own ambitions. Both had claims on territories that were under British control, and thus out of their reach. The Iranians had long-standing claims on Bahrain, a number of Gulf Islands, and also pretensions on the rest of the Gulf shoreline, since they saw it as their own natural sphere of influence. The Saudis had very little time for the petty sheikhdoms and would have run over them in the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th, if the British were not there to scare them off. There had been standoffs as late as 1955 in Buraimi, where British forces had to expel Saudi encroachment by a show of military force. Saudi Arabia's land boundaries with many of its neighbours remain under dispute to this day. Part of the tension was religious: Iranian Shias empathised with Shias in Bahrain and Eastern Saudi Arabia; Wahhabi Saudis saw the Shias as quasi infidels and were also much irritated with the more liberal practices of Islam on the Trucial Coast.

In writings on this period about the process of the British disengagement in the Arabian Peninsula, very often Saudi Arabia is either mentioned fleetingly or in narrow contexts[51]. It is however impossible to write about any issue connected with the Arabian

[51] This is certainly the case with many of the memoirs, but can also be seen in more scholarly writings such as those of Heard-Bey (2004) and Balfour-Paul (1994). An exception is Dresch (2000) where the role of Saudi Arabia in the various events in Yemen is well documented.

Peninsula without remembering the central role that Saudi Arabia plays in the life of the area. Indeed, the most important and lasting factor of the British involvement with the region has been, and remains, that it became a barrier to Saudi Arabia's instinctive urge to dominate the peninsula. Throughout the events that this thesis discusses, Saudi Arabia was never a passive observer. It viewed events with concern and used different methods to influence them. The revolution in Yemen brought home to the Saudis the dangers that existed from inaction, and the eventual deposition of King Saud by his brother King Faisal in 1964 reflected a wide – though far from absolute – consensus within the royal family of the need to modernise, reform and be pro-active in the region.

The first reaction of American and even some British officials on sensing the British government's desire to withdraw from the Gulf, was to think that Saudi Arabia should be allowed to do what it had been stopped from doing a century earlier. Astute observers, such as Luce, visualised a scenario whose 'central feature would be Saudi Arabia, led by a progressive monarchy and militarily well-equipped within the limitations of its population. The Gulf states, or what remained of them, would become satellites of Saudi Arabia, led by Sheikhly families who would be autonomous in internal affairs, though subject to strong pressures and perhaps more, from Saudi Arabia if the conduct of any of them imperilled the security of the whole.'[52] Luce dubs his plan "Arabian Peninsula solidarity". Luce's predecessor, Sir George Middleton had raised the prospect in 1960 but was strongly rebuffed by London.[53]

Others outside the British government were also thinking on the same lines, as can be seen from the record of a conversation in 1964 between the US Ambassador to Iraq, Robert C. Strong, and the visiting French Consul-General in Aden, Paul Carton. The US embassy in Baghdad reported to the State Department that:

[52] Luce, Valedictory, 19 July 1966; LUCE G2.
[53] Ovendale (1996), p225-6.

> Mr Carton considered that the possibility of future trouble in the area was great, as the contradictions of increasing wealth and continuing backwardness, autocracy and lack of opportunity for constructive development became more and more pronounced. The British were trying hard to push and haul the Sheikhs and the Sultan into taking a more enlightened approach, but were not succeeding. The Ambassador speculated personally that perhaps the best thing for the area as a whole was to let it become a whole (sic). Perhaps the British in their urge to reduce their commitments would find it in their best interest to let the natural power in the area, Saudi Arabia, assume control of the Trucial Coast and perhaps Qatar. Perhaps a Labour government in some future day might entertain such ideas. British commercial interests would still be well served by British commercial know-how. Mr Carton thought this reasonable once Saudi Arabia proved it was really modernising.[54]

In a more comprehensive assessment of Saudi intentions towards the Peninsula, four years later, the US Embassy in Jeddah, produced a report for the State Department entitled "Saudi Arabia takes another look at the Arabian Peninsula". The assessment says that Saudi Arabia now had a choice, either 'to annex certain riparian areas (for example, the Trucial States); or merely to seek to establish predominant foreign influence over such areas (as in the case of Yemen and South Arabia)'.[55]

For the Gulf States, and for Yemen, Saudi Arabia was the elephant in the room, whose presence and influence were never to be forgotten. It is however also important to remember that relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia, up to the 1962 Yemeni revolution, were very strained, and diplomatic relations had been broken after the 1955 Buraimi incident[56]. Macmillan suspected that Saudi Arabia was colluding with Nasser to undermine the British position in Yemen.[57]

Iran, then as now, was the regional giant that expected to be recognised as such by its smaller neighbours. In the 1960s the Shah's position was based on, 'historic and natural rights and the canons of justice and is based upon the principles of co-operation peace,

[54] Memorandum of Conversation from American Embassy Baghdad to State Department, Airgram A669 10 February 1964, NARA 2745, pp1324-5.

[55] US Embassy Jeddah to State Department, 14 February 1968, pp2-3. NARA 2273 pp1101-1111.

[56] Catterall (2011), p50, fn78.

[57] Catterall (2011), p347, Diary entry for 28 December 1960.

tranquillity and non-interference by countries outside the riparian states and emirates in the affairs of the Persian Gulf.'[58]

Britain saw the Shah's Iran as both an ally in the Gulf and a possible trouble maker. Whilst the Shah's regime was at this point fully embedded within the western fold there were still concerns that he may at some point find it more convenient to turn neutral[59]. Apart from its ambitions to be the region's hegemon Iran had specific claims on a number of the territories under British protection, including the Island of Bahrain, and a number of other islands that were recognised by the British as being part of the Trucial States. These issues had to be ironed out before the British departed if a crisis was to be averted immediately after. An intensive British diplomatic effort took place from 1968-71 to achieve this. The discussions are considered so sensitive that even now – nearly fifty years later – many of the British government files remain closed, and the records in the archives of Sir William Luce and others involved with the process similarly sanitised.[60] There is intensive speculation, fuelled by what has been released in the official papers, and by what seems to have been withheld, that Britain had cut a deal with the Shah whereby Iran withdrew its claim on Bahrain, and in return was allowed to occupy the Islands of Abu Musa and the two Tunbs, two Islands that were until then considered to be part of the Emirates of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah, in the last hours as the British presence ended, and the new state of the United Arab Emirates was born.[61]

[58] Letter from Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Sahedi to Edward Heath reproduced in Kayhan International on 30 June 1969.

[59] A point made by Luce when addressing the Conservative Party Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees on 24 January 1967: 'If the Shah became officially neutralist this in practice would mean that his policies would tend to be directed against western interests'. LUCE G52C.

[60] In the files in the National Archive scores of files related to the end of the British period in the Persian Gulf have parts of them redacted, but enough is left to show that the content refers to this issue. There is so much of this that one comes to the conclusion that the official going through the files before their release, usually a retired senior diplomat, was told to withhold anything related to this topic.

[61] UAE historians in private speak about this openly, although they are more cautious in public. It is also suggested by Taryam (1988). A detailed discussion of this important issue is beyond the immediate scope of this thesis, but will be referred to again particularly with regard to the decision-making process leading to the creation of the UAE, especially in Chapter 5.

A third country, Yemen always sat somewhat aloof. Ruled by a Shia Imamate, the country was tribally based, with a mountainous terrain, backward and impoverished. In Yemen in the first half of the 20th century 'one depended on God'.[62] Yemen emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire after a failed British attempt to occupy it after the capitulation of the Ottoman Sultan. It also inherited Ottoman claims on the British controlled Aden protectorate, and until Suez, the Imam was the bogeyman for the British in Aden. British strategy had been to try to manage Yemen. The Treaty of Sana'a between Britain and Imam Yahya had been negotiated by Sir Bernard Reilly (Resident – later Governor – of Aden from 1931-40), and signed in February 1934[63]. It bypassed the issue of sovereignty over South Arabia and Aden, but recognised a previous Anglo-Turkish dividing line in Yemen.[64] One of its effects was that Yemen remained neutral during WWII. A provision of the Treaty stipulated, or at least was thus understood by the Imam, that the British would do nothing in the WAP that would change the status of the territory. The danger that the Imam would see the "forward policy" pursued in the early 1950s as a breach of the Treaty was well understood in London[65], but Aden decided to push on regardless. For a decade, between 1952-62, relations were difficult, with occasional border skirmishes. The Imam provided arms, money and safe haven to those who had problems with the British administration in the WAP – and the "forward policy" added many to that list – but given the weakness of the Imamate the threat was always modest, an irritant rather than a serious danger to Aden and British interests. The Imam however saw the proposal to create a Federation of Arab Emirates of the South as a serious challenge to his interests, especially since it was seen to be driven by those in the WAP who were least friendly to him. .

[62] Dresch (2000), p23.

[63] Reilly remained in the Colonial Office from 1940-61 and provided continuity in Whitehall for British policy at this time.

[64] Dresch (2000), p34.

[65] Trevaskis (1968), p49. In a meeting with Reilly at the Colonial Office in the Winter of 1953, Trevaskis had told him about his ideas for a Federation. Reilly told Trevaskis that the Imam 'won't like it'.

There is a misperception that British entanglement with internal Yemeni affairs started after the 1962 revolution. In fact, by that time Britain was already well embroiled in plots of its own to overthrow the Imam.[66] These included, not only punitive measures against tribes allied with the Imam in the border areas, but also plans to overthrow the Imam outright, what Trevaskis in his diary calls 'the big proposals'. On 3 May 1958, he wrote:

> The big proposals are now reaching a point of decision. Newsome of State Department, Washington, Gareth Barnes of the Cabinet office and Geoffrey McDermitt (to whom I fagged in Marlborough) of Foreign Office, are all coming out to discuss this in detail.....Our aim is to bump off the Imam, win over Army or principal tribes and then install Hassan[67] or any other suitable candidate. Snags are (1) personal anti-[unclear] of Sheriff Hussain (2) fact that public opinion in Yemen probably does not want Hassan more than Ahmed; (3) that what public opinion really wants is a quasi-democratic republic which is just what we didn't want. We decide we must consult the Audhali and Sherif Hussein [of Beihan] if we are to work out a detailed plan. They will be in by Monday.[68]

An entry a few days later, on 7 May 1958 states:

> We have full discussion on big proposal at G.H. with the American team. Americans composed of David Newsome, Brown with of course Crawford the Consul.....We estimate cost of getting Hassan in £250.000; 25,000 rifles + 10,000,000 rds and a few etceteras.[69]

The British and the American never managed to overthrow Imam Ahmed, and indeed for a short while seemed to have found a *modus vivendi* with him, which lasted until the 26 September 1962 revolution led by Colonel Abdulla Sallal. Up to this point the Arabian Peninsula was a sideshow to much more dramatic events happening in the rest of the Arab World. Mass anti-western expressions occurred in many Arab countries prior to WWII. These can be broadly explained as expressions of rejection by *Dar el-Islam* of *Dar el-Hirb*. Arab nationalism did exist as an intellectual force prior to WWII, but it was primarily the prerogative of a small elite. Sorbonne-educated Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al Bitar

[66] Mawby (2002) discusses in some detail British attempts to undermine the Imam in the period after 1957 but says that details of the discussions about the proposals 'are currently unavailable'. (p116)

[67] Prince Hassan bin Yahya was at this time living in exile in New York. He was later to play an important part in the civil war on the side of the royalists.

[68] TREV II/1

[69] TREV II/1

founded the Baath Party in the 1930s, on whose early ideas (rather than its later practices when in power) other Arab nationalists fed – secularism, socialism, anti-imperialism and nationalism. Palestine had given Arab nationalism a cause, and in Britain, – seen as responsible for its loss to the Arab nation – an enemy. When the Egyptian revolution happened in 1952 it was led by military officers, not particularly well-educated, but much closer to the people. Egyptian grievances with the British over-lordship of their country were very much homegrown, and needed no greater justification. But framing Egyptian nationalism in a pan-Arab context gave Nasser kudos at home and international prestige, which no Egyptian leader of modern times had. The nationalist message got translated into the language of the people. The moment coincided with a technological advance that the young Egyptian revolutionaries embraced as fast as the first teenagers of the 21st century embraced Facebook and Twitter – the transistor radio. The Arab masses were widely dispersed and largely illiterate. Radio bridged both gaps. The advent of the transistor radio made the availability of receivers a much cheaper option. Instead of being a toy for the elites, radio became a daily household addition, even for poor families. Between 1955 and 1957 30,000 radio receivers were imported into Aden – an astonishing figure when one remembers that the population at the time was about 150,000.[70] Governor Luce speaking at the opening of new studios for Aden Broadcasting Corporation in April 1957 estimated that 'every family in Aden must have bought a radio during the past two years'.[71] Hundreds of radio receivers were also being imported in the more remote Protectorate Areas. Luce added, 'My protectorate friends tell me that four years ago it was a rarity to find a wireless in the protectorate – it is now becoming uncommon to find a house without one'.

[70] Luce, at the opening of new studios for Aden Broadcasting Corporation on 16 April 1957. Luce admits that some of the radios would have been re-exported. LUCE 52A/53.

[71] Luce op cit.

A programme on Cairo Radio that started off modestly as one of many, soon assumed a dimension that caught both its creators and those at the receiving end of its sharp tongue by surprise. *Sawt el Arab* was initially designed as a kind of family show with music, entertainment and news. Its message spread like wildfire throughout the Arab world where communities had lived in isolation for centuries. *Sawt el Arab* was to become a nemesis for British influence in the region. It turned Nasser into superman – not only in Arab eyes but extraordinarily in British eyes as well. Whilst the British were right to recognise the importance of *Sawt el Arab* they may have misunderstood why it was important. As Frantz Fanon argues, the importance of anti-colonial radio broadcasts was not their actual content, but the fact that it made the listener at one with the struggle.[72] *Sawt el Arab* turned local grievances into part of the national struggle. It helped articulate the message of demonstrators in remote areas, who all of a sudden felt that they were part of a much larger movement.[73]

After the 1962 revolution, there was much soul-searching in the Foreign Office regarding whether or not to recognise the new government. Certainly, the government of the Imam had not been on the friendliest of terms with Britain. But the prospect of an ally of Nasser on the doorstep of Aden and the protectorate immediately raised alarm bells. The instinct of the Foreign Office was to recognise the new government, since it seemed to have de facto control of the country, usually the main criterion for recognition, whilst the political leadership of the Colonial Office, was very much against. When days after the coup it emerged that the Imam had not in fact been killed, and was now in the mountains rallying supporters in an attempt to make a comeback the matter took a different twist. A school of thought argues that within the British establishment there were those who saw this as an opportunity to engage Nasser and try to reverse the humiliation of Suez. Others go so far as to

[72] Fanon (1970), p70.
[73] Sammut (2013).

suggest that they even wanted revenge[74]. As Dresch puts it, 'The British (officially) were hesitant, with a Foreign Office inclination to recognise the new Republic, and a Colonial Office inclination the other way, but such Aden officials as Trevaskis shared the wish of right wing politicians in London to "give Abdul Nasser a bloody nose" and the Colonial office view prevailed.'[75] Subsequently, not only did Britain refuse to recognise the republican government, it also engaged in a covert operation to supply the monarchist forces with arms and mercenaries[76], a process that involved collusion with the Israeli Air Force for the purpose of transporting supplies from South Arabia to territories in Yemen occupied by Royalist forces.[77] These processes triggered a big internal discussion within the Foreign Office, and it is important to register that there were very diverse views. An important one was expressed by the British Ambassador to Cairo, Sir Harold Beeley in a despatch to the Foreign Secretary on 25 February 1963. Beeley challenged the idea that confrontation was the best way of dealing with Nasser, and warned against the impossibility of resisting Nasserism without being seen opposing all forms of Arab nationalism. Beeley questioned the extent of Nasser's threat to British interests, and pointed out that Nasser had not 'in fact, up to now, given any high priority to the undermining of Aden or the Gulf sheikhdoms…'[78].

1.3 Cold War Context

As a victorious power after WWII, Britain played a central role in the design of the new post-war world order through its participation in the peace conferences in Yalta and Potsdam, but already there were signs that the US and the USSR in the end mattered more. The global ambitions of the Soviet Union and the threat of communism defined that post-war

[74] This is supported by Usher Orkaby in his thesis (in progress). I am grateful to have had the opportunity to consult part of this thesis before its completion.

[75] Dresch (2000), p91.

[76] Cormac (2012) suggests that bureaucratic tensions in Whitehall made this operation less effective than it could have been.

[77] Orkaby (2012).

[78] Beeley to Lord Home, PREM 11/4173.

order in ways that were largely unexpected and unfavourable to the British position. It found itself needing to maintain global military commitments, such as stationing an army in Germany and joining the US in fighting a war in Korea, whilst trying to hold on to an empire that had been shaken at its foundations by the war. At the same time, it had to address social challenges at home. The communist menace meant that the United States did not retreat to isolation after the war, as it had done in 1918, and also that a weakened Britain now had to play second fiddle to it. Managing this relationship became a primary consideration for every Prime Minister after and including Churchill. British policy in the Middle East was therefore never freestanding. It always somehow had to fit within that picture. Suez was the bitter lesson that ensured that no British government could ever again ignore this reality.

The Indian Ocean and its tributaries remained for most of the 1950s and 1960s largely a Western preserve. The USSR did not have the capacity to operate freely in the region, since it remained essentially a land and air power, which never achieved naval parity. In the region the USSR worked mainly through proxies who were primarily political rather than military allies, such as India, Iraq, Egypt and Indonesia. Even so their actions were often viewed through a Cold War prism. In the Far East, some of the anti-colonial struggles took on an ideological character, even though they probably had their roots closer to home. Britain had to deal with a Chinese-led insurgency in Malaya, and the Vietnamese – having expelled the French from Indochina – were soon confronting the United States in a long and bloody struggle that lasted right through the 1960s. American public opinion, whilst staunchly anti-communist, was also sensitive to the need of burden-sharing.

Like those of Britain, US interests in the Arabian Peninsula were largely commercial. After WWI, American companies had elbowed their way into Saudi Arabia and took the whole prize of Saudi oil. These companies had further oil interests in the rest of the Persian Gulf, but were happy to share this with the British. The US also had an interest to make sure

that nobody else intruded on the region and so the British presence was positively welcomed. Unlike the British, the Americans also kept an open mind about Nasser for most of his time in office, and preferred to manage him rather than confront him. British and American policy diverged after the 1962 Yemen revolution, since the Americans were not instinctively averse to change in Yemen, and saw the replacement of the mediaeval regime of the Imam as being long overdue. In a further twist to this global picture, the United States recognised that since the British presence in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula had existed for a long time, it was widely accepted through sheer force of habit. US strategists feared that if they introduced a direct American military involvement in the region this would provoke a Soviet response. Thus, for example, when the British deployed troops in Kuwait in 1961, both the UK and the US government came to the view that an American flotilla, which was close by and could be easily sent in support of the British action, would be kept out of the theatre of operations, until absolutely necessary.[79] This was the backdrop to the decade-long conversation between Britain and the United States, from 1962-72, on Britain's role in the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean at large.

The US managed its relations with the western shore of the Gulf from its Consulate-General in Dhahran, at the centre of the Saudi oil industry. In the second half of the 1960s the US government was being lobbied by the rulers of the Trucial States to fill in any vacuum left by the British, whilst the Americans generally tried to present a position of unity with their British allies. A report, summarising the first meeting between a visiting American diplomat from the Dhahran Consulate and the new ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966, Sheikh Zayed, shortly after he had taken over power from his brother, is typical:

> The conversation then turned to the relationship of the US-UK in the Gulf. The relationship, the reporting officer pointed out to the ruler, is established on a firm basis and acknowledges the political and economic position of the British in the Gulf.

[79] See Ovendale (1996), Chapter 9.

> While the US is a commercial competitor of the British in the Gulf, it is not our policy to attempt in any way to supplant them politically.
>
> US-UK co-operation in this area is predicated on an assessment that there is a need for political stability and practical economic development in the Gulf. Sheikh Zayid (sic) said that he was very pleased that the two great western powers worked harmoniously in this area because he was very much aware that there were forces, even within the Western alliance (unmistakable reference to France) who opposed close Anglo-American cooperation. While Zayid voiced no opposition to the US playing second fiddle in the Gulf to the British, he made it very clear that the US would in any case be held responsible for the eventual political and economic evolution of the area. The conversation concluded with the reporting officer reviewing for the ruler the United States Government's worldwide commitments stressing our current preoccupation with the Vietnam Crisis.[80]

This clear and unambiguous US position did not stop the Gulf rulers from pushing for more direct US involvement. For example on 17 November 1966 the brother of the ruler of Bahrain, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa, during a call at the State Department in Washington, told his American hosts that:

> Bahrain and all the other Gulf States are most worried over anticipated developments in South Arabia following the 1968 British departure. They fear the UAR will take over in that region and ultimately threaten seizure of the gulf. The UAR's current activities in Yemen foreshadow the nature of its possible future activities elsewhere in the Peninsula.
>
> Bahrain is most desirous that the British remain as protectors in the Gulf and has received strong assurances from HMG that they intend to do so. However Bahrain feels that the same type of internal British financial and political pressures which led HMG to evacuate Aden may similarly lead it suddenly to leave the Gulf. In this contingency, Bahrain most strongly hopes that the US will be willing to assume some responsibility for Gulf security.[81]

The US government was therefore well aware of the concerns in the Gulf on future security, and intent on pushing the British to maintain their commitments in the region. Having been sucked into the Vietnam War, a commitment that the Labour Government refused to share, and under increasing domestic pressure to cut its expenditure on Europe's defence, the US administration was extremely sensitive to suggestions of a lessening of

[80] NARA 2645 pp2178-2183 US Consulate Dhahran to the State Department, 2 November 1966, summarising the meeting of Philip J. Griffin with Sheikh Zayed held a month earlier.

[81] NARA 535 AF2/2-4 p758 State Department to Dhahran, 22 November 1966.

Britain's worldwide responsibilities. On being pre-warned of the announcement of British withdrawal East of Suez, the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, spoke in apocalyptic terms, saying that 'what was in prospect was a major withdrawal of Britain in world affairs. This would be a catastrophic loss to human society. This was a question of the highest level of instinct and judgement as to where the human family was going.'[82] This meeting clearly rattled the usually unflappable Labour Foreign Secretary, George Brown, who in an animated report to the Cabinet the following day described it as 'bloody unpleasant'.[83] This notwithstanding the US position by and large shared the view that a large British military re-deployment from Aden to the Persian Gulf could be counterproductive and that the long-term solution needed to involve Iran and Saudi Arabia, at the time both close US allies.

Apart from political, military and geo-strategic considerations, the world in the 1960s was changing rapidly in many other ways. Instant communication changed the way politicians and the political world worked. The media became much more inquisitive and much less deferential than it ever was. Public opinion, not only at home, but also globally had to be taken into account.[84] The time of gunboat diplomacy seemed to be over. Global institutions, such as the United Nations, offered a forum where new nations could flex their muscles. The 1964 Labour Government was the first and only British government to give its representatives in the UN a seat in the Cabinet.

Human rights were also becoming an issue. The Labour Government was sensitive to concerns amongst its backbench following reports of torture in Aden, and its attempts to

[82] PREM 13/3326.

[83] Bennett (2013) p117.

[84] There was also a seismic change in the way the British public perceived imperial ventures from the time of the Suez Crisis to the withdrawal from Aden. In the mid-fifties the British public was still gripped by the memories of WWII, even if after the high excitement of 1939-45 Britain was now in the "hang-over period". Anthony Sampson describes the public reaction to the Egyptian nationalisation of the Suez Canal: …'there was an instinctive feeling that something must be done. There was a mood of tribal recidivism, like the moods that sweep through a school, which was not easy to resist.' Sampson (1967), p112. By the mid-sixties the British public had lost appetite for imperial adventures and there was, at best, lukewarm support for the anti-insurgency operations in Aden.

manage the issue made British officials on the ground edgy. The matter came to a head when the Swedish Chapter of Amnesty International despatched one of its experts, Dr Salehuddin Ratsgeldi to Aden to prepare a report.[85] There he was stonewalled by the High Commissioner, Turnbull and denied access to the notorious Interrogation Centre at Ras Morbut and prison of al Mansoura, and he had to be content with interviewing former detainees.[86] His report, however, even before it was published, focused minds. The International Committee of the Red Cross got involved and its Delegate to the Arab Peninsula, Andre Rochat, visited Aden 'to investigate arrests, interrogation and imprisonment of presumed terrorists', and was given access to the two prisons.[87] There he met Roderick Bowen, a barrister and Liberal Party MP, who had been appointed as a special emissary of the Foreign Secretary, 'to investigate procedures for dealing with reports of torture at al Mansoura, but not specific allegations.'[88] Although the Bowen report was largely inconsequential, it quoted a damaging memo from the Deputy Director of the Health Service in Aden to the Deputy High Commissioner. It said that 'the injuries sustained by detainees brought from the Interrogation Centre indicates that their interrogation was assisted by physical violence... I should be grateful if the allegations of physical violence which were substantiated by bruises and torn eardrums, etc, could be investigated.'[89] Wilson himself seemed to believe that 'irregularities' existed.[90]

[85] The circumstances around the Ratsgeldi report are discussed in detail in Sellars (2002) Ch. 5, and in an article by the same author in *Round Table* (2004) pp709-724.

[86] Detainees continued insisting that torture had taken place, long after the British had left. A leader of the NLF, Saleh Musleh Qassem said in an interview on 23 September 1984: 'Sometimes they would bundle a person into some sacking and leave him suspended in air from a helicopter'; (BFI/EE-T Item 31). On the same day, another, Abdel Eazak Shaif said, 'I was detained in one of the British prisons known as Fort Morbut. This was an investigation detention camp and many of the militants who took part in the liberation were detained there. I was detained there for eight months. During this period I was subjected to psychological as well as physical torture. This includes beatings, electric shocks and other vicious methods of torture. Many of those so tortured were left disfigured, and I was no exception'; (BFI-EE/T item 36).

[87] International Review of the Red Cross, Vol 6 Issue 69, December 1966.

[88] Sellars (2002), p105.

[89] Ibid.

[90] The extent of human rights abuses in Aden and the South Arabia Federation in the final years of British rule remains unclear. This is wdue to two factors, the first is that the British authorities maintained, and

There is therefore no doubt that the events that unfolded on the Arabian Peninsula as the British tried to reconfigure their relationship with the region were greatly influenced by external considerations. Balancing these external considerations with the realities within the British possessions became the most sensitive and determining factor for both British and Arab actors, and those who had a better sense of the wider realities emerged more successful than those whose knowledge was more parochial.

1.4 Objectives - British Interests and the choice of tactics.

There was in Britain cross-party consensus on the importance of British economic and commercial interests in Arabia. Oil had hugely increased these interests. Macmillan wrote in his diary in 1958 that 'Kuwait with its massive oil production is the key to the economic life of Britain and Europe'[91]. What military and strategic interests Britain had were of the negative sort – to deny them to others. Until 1957, Britain kept only a symbolic military presence in the region, depending most of the time on locally enlisted and British officered military formations such as Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS)[92] and the Aden Protectorate Levies

continue to maintain, the façade that any abuses that happened outside the Colony of Aden, in the Federation, was not their responsibility. The extent to which the problem existed there can only be assessed on the basis that, even today, information from British archive sources continues to trickle out, rather than be released fully. For example in the authorised history of MI5, Christopher Andrew says, based on archive material to which he had access, that the head of station in Aden (SLO), Sandy Stewart, was concerned by the brutality of some of the interrogations conducted by the Federal Ministry of Internal Security, and believed it necessary to: "emphasise that it is both morally wrong as well as being unproductive to torture or subject to third degree treatment the subjects of interrogation but in so doing, also seek to have it clearly understood by the Federal Government that such procedures are not practised by ourselves in the Aden interrogation centre at Fort Marbut" ' (Andrew, 2009, pp175-6). Furthermore, even more than in other colonies the files on this matter have been destroyed, and therefore much of the evidence is secondary. That there were serious concerns at the time is, however, indisputable. A Downing Street official wrote to a colleague at the MOD, 'The Prime Minister is inclined to the view that .... there is apparently prime fac(i)e evidence of irregularities (to put it no higher) at the interrogation centre'. (Palliser to Nairne, 21 November 1966, PREM 13/1294 quoted in Sellars (2002) p105.

[91] Catterall, (2011), 18 July 1958, p137.

[92] The Trucial Oman Levies were raised in 1951 with the political Resident in Bahrain as their Commander in Chief. It changed its name to Trucial Oman Scouts in 1956. TOS' headquarters was established in Sharjah because at this point this was where the most senior British representative on the Trucial Coast was based. The first Commander came on secondment from the Arab Legion in Jordan, with two Jordanian officers, but later a large number of the officers of the TOS were British officers who had served in the Sudan Army before independence. The TOS faced two crucial challenges in its first years, the first the stand-off with Saudi

(APL)[93]. This changed briefly in the period 1958-65 when the base in Aden came to be perceived as important in its own right, and instead of the region being a consumer of security as it had always been, it became, even if for a fleeting moment, a producer.

A confidential report[94] prepared by the Conservative Party, summarises British interests as: '1. Continued development of oil resources under stable conditions economically satisfactory to the needs of consumers. (World oil consumption is expected, by the industry, to double in the next ten years). 2. Prevention of Russian or other Communist advances into the gulf or the Red Sea with its effect on Persia, the Indian sub-continent and Africa. 3. Maintenance of British east-about air route. 4. Maintenance and expansion of British trade.'

Arabia over the Buraimi Oasis; the second the rebellion against the Sultan of Muscat and Oman by the Imam in the Jebel Akhdar, where the TOS was deployed in support of the Sultan's Forces, until the SAS flushed out the rebellion in 1958. In both operations the TOS emerged with honour and the level of discipline and professionalism was considered higher than that of the APL. Donald Hawley, who was Political Officer in Dubai in the 1950s and later the first British Ambassador to Oman, attributes this to the professionalism of the British officers and NCOs, their previous experience with the Sudanese Army and the way that they interacted with the Arab *other ranks*. He says that the British officers 'spent quite a long time hob-nobbing with the troops and drinking coffee with them'. He adds 'when a P.A. or an officer called on a Ruler or other notable, the escort would always attend them and sit on the floor in the traditional kneeling position – or later on chairs – holding their rifles. They would participate in the hospitality offered by the ruler to the same extent as the senior officers. Their manners were impeccable and they would join the debate of the Majlis naturally if called on. It was very easy, pleasant and in its way democratic.' (HAW9/7/41).

As of 1 January 1961, the TOS complement on paper was of 48 British Officers, 33 Arab Officers, 132 British Other Ranks and 1227 Arab other ranks, but the actual strength was 37 British officers, 8 Arab officers, 99 British other ranks and 1221 other ranks. The Arab component – the term "Arab" often used to describe anybody who was not British - were spread out over "tribal" affiliations, this term also being used in its most liberal sense and included those designated by nationality, for example Pakistanis (75), Baluch (133), Persians (14), Jordanian (2), Indian (34) etc., whilst most were listed by their Arab Peninsula tribal affiliation, the most important of which were the Kaabi (262), the Naimi (103), the Dauffari (103) and the Daawahir (107). (TOS statistical Data and General Information State, 1 January 1961; HAW/9/7/1). There was a problem with recruiting men from the Trucial States for the TOS, and as can be seen from the data the Arab officer complement was well below strength.

[93] The APL were established in 1928 under the aegis of the RAF which had a year before declaring Aden an Air Command. Its primary objective was to defend the newly established air facility in Khormaksar, although it could also be called upon by the Governor of Aden to assist the civil police when required. It was recruited mainly from the tribes of the WAP. (Lord and Birtles, 2001, p19). It was made up of a force of around 600 men, but this expanded during WWII to 1600 men who were deployed as far afield as Socotra and Sharjah. The role of the APL changed substantially when, on 1 April 1957, they were taken over by the Army, which was considered more experienced for the kind of role that was now expected of them, to deal with both frontier incursions, and internal rebellion.

[94] CCOC report, 25 January 1967, entitled "The Persian Gulf in British Policy", Appendix 1. LUCE G41. The recently retired Luce helped prepare the report. He is described as 'an authority consulted'.

The report says that 36% (1965) of oil production in the Middle East, (excluding North Africa) was by British and British/Dutch interests and the region had 62% of the world proven oil reserves (80% if one excludes the US and Eastern Bloc); The report emphasises that this also impacted the balance of payments, since half of the UK market was served by British-owned companies, thus profits are deductible from foreign exchange costs. 43% of British consumption was from Middle East sources. The region was also an important trade partner: Aden and the countries bordering the Persian Gulf imported £123 million worth of British goods in 1965. The report says that 'the British and British/Dutch oil companies' net contribution on all operations to the British balance of payments in 1965 was upwards of £180 million.' It also says that Kuwait's sterling balances held in London are estimated at between £250 million and £400 million and contribute greatly to the position of sterling as a world currency.'[95]

The Labour Party had also recognised the importance of this, even when in opposition. A report by a specially appointed working group to look at Britain's interests in the Middle East stated in 1959 that 'Britain's economic interest in the Gulf …. is more than simply the ability to import oil. The investments in London of their oil revenue by the rulers, particularly the Sheikh of Kuwait, are an important part of the capital available for investment. Again the profits of the oil companies account for a large proportion of British earnings from foreign investment.'[96] If anything, the region's importance only increased by the time Labour took power in 1964. Problems with sterling during the second half of the 1960s coincided with increased liquidity by the Gulf oil producing countries. A lot of the bilateral discussions with Abu Dhabi following the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut in 1966 and the coming to power of Sheikh Zayed were connected with Abu Dhabi's sterling deposits in London. One of the first steps after the new ruler took over was to install a British financial

[95] CCOC Report, Appendix 2. LUCE G41.
[96] TUC 4, Report entitled "Great Power Interests and Commitments in the Middle East".

adviser in Abu Dhabi. Agreements on Abu Dhabi's sterling balances were also signed between Abu Dhabi and the British government soon after.[97] The economic importance of the region was therefore well-recognised. What was less clear, however, and much more disputable, was how to secure those interests.

One of the oddest episodes in Britain's end of empire story revolved around the issue of the military base in Aden. Whilst Aden was strategically[98] important as a commercial and logistic hub it was never a fortress colony such as Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus or Singapore.[99] This was a nuanced but important difference. Navy ships used it to refuel and pick up supplies, but it did not have the extensive dockyard facilities of Malta and Singapore. The local population was not used to seeing huge numbers of British troops. Indeed, the British military presence was very thin on the ground, based mainly around an RAF station at Khormaksar, on the edge of the colony. Aerial sorties from Aden kept the tribes of the protectorates on the straight and narrow, bombing the houses of recalcitrant tribal chiefs whenever necessary.[100] Whilst RAF Khormaksar was strengthened during WWII, for most of the time its firepower consisted of a sole squadron of Wellington aircraft, 621 (GR) Squadron, with some additional administrative units, including a hospital that had been established before the war.[101] Troops on the ground consisted of around 300 officers and men of the RAF Regiment (No. 58 and 66 Rifle Squadrons), whose duties were to protect the

[97] FO 93/13724 (Persian Gulf no 24, Agreement 24 October 1968.)

[98] This was famously recognised in the speech of Lord Lloyd, a Colonial Office Minister, when opening the new Aden Legislative Council in May 1956, during which he stated that 'HMG wish to make it clear that the importance of Aden both strategically and economically within the Commonwealth is such that they cannot foresee the possibility of any relaxation of their responsibilities for the Colony.' ("Aden, Report for 1955-56", Colonial Office, 1958.)

[99] The need to hold on to fortress colonies, and not to accept with regard to them the ambiguity that was inevitably to be the hallmark of the new relationship with the rest of the empire, was a constant theme of policy makers from the end of WWII onwards. Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus, Hong Kong and Singapore were inevitably included in the list as early as 1945. Aden started being put in this category much later. (See for example, Creech-Jones, 1945)

[100] For example between 1947-49 there were eight bombing air operations against tribes in the WAP (Petersen, 1986, Table 3.1).

[101] Lord and Birtles, p67.

airfield, support internal security operations and be able to re-enforce British Somaliland if necessary.[102]

As often happens with decisions of this kind, the decision to turn Aden into the hub of British military power in the Middle East was taken incrementally and without due regard for all of its implications. Amery wrote to Trevaskis in 1954 after the British Government's decision to withdraw its troops from the Suez Canal Zone had been announced*:*

> I regret the decision to leave Egypt and we may pay for it very dear. All the same it's no use crying over spilt milk and our job now must be to reconstruct our Middle Eastern positions on new foundations. In such reconstruction Aden might have a large part to play. It could be our main window on the Indian Ocean and the rear base for maintaining our influence in the Persian Gulf. Leaving Egypt may make our sea communications more hazardous but I imagine modern aeroplanes can make the journey Cyprus or Benghazi to Aden fairly easily. These things make me feel that it is very important that we should make quite sure of our political position both in the Colony and in the Protectorate and we should not delay building whatever new installations may be required to make the place a real centre of British influence. I gather from what Eden said in the House the other day that you are likely to receive considerable RAF reinforcement before long.[103]

The displacement from the Suez Canal led to the first large increase in the number of British troops in Aden, so that by 31 December 1957 there were 373 officers and 2500 men of the RAF, and 158 officers and 1473 men from the Army.[104] The expansion was sudden and unexpected, as could be seen from the bad conditions in which the soldiers had to live. This triggered criticism in both Parliament and the media. When one of the Scottish regiments, the Royal Highland Fusiliers, was deployed to Aden in 1959, a Scottish MP was told in a reply to a parliamentary question that the troops were to be housed 'in huts and under canvas' until proper barracks accommodation could be built.[105]

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[102] Ibid p97.

[103] Amery to Trevaskis 3 August 1954 TREV I/5/2 Amery is referring to Eden's speech in the House of Commons on 29 June 1954 during the Suez canal Debate, in which he stated that 'some of the redeployment will consist in strengthening our air forces in Aden'. (Hansard, 29 June 1954).

[104] C0 1015/2027; "Forces in Aden". The note also says that the RAF had the following aircraft: 1 combined squadron Venoms and Vampires; 1 Squadron Shackletons; 1 Squadron Pioneers; 1 Squadron Valettas; 3 Pembrokes; 3 Sycamores; 1 Canberra and 3 Meteors.

[105] Hansard, 2 December 1958; PQ of William Ross to the Secretary of State for War.

The next expansion was the result of events in Cyprus, and was reflected in the 1958 Defence White Paper, which split the Middle East Command and created a separate independent integrated command for the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf in Aden. The White Paper confidently states, 'The creation of this new Command will involve only a slight increase in the staff of the existing headquarters at Aden.'[106] It marked a major point of the militarisation of Aden.[107] By the time of the February 1961 Defence White Paper[108] the Command in Aden had been re-designated to Middle East Command with a remit well beyond the Arabian Peninsula. The White Paper still talked of Kenya as the location for the brigade-size British strategic reserve. Soon however it became clear that Kenya was not going to be available after independence and the brigade was moved to Aden without any consultation with the local people, nor it seems with the local British administrators, and without any regard to the sensibilities of an Arab population already steered by nationalism and anti-colonial feeling. All of a sudden the people of Aden started seeing huge barracks facilities sprouting out as if from nowhere. The underlying message, that this huge military deployment sent, was that the British intended to stay in Aden forever. By the time of withdrawal in 1967, there were 30,000 British troops in Aden and the Protectorates, plus thousands of dependents and support personnel.

The impact of the militarisation of Aden on the colony and on increasing anti-British feeling in the colony should not be underestimated. Indeed a number of key officials who

[106] CAB/129/91 Cabinet Paper C(58)34, 6 February 1958, para52.

[107] The change also created a rift between Governor Luce and the military, prompting the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Gerald Templar to write to the Colonial Office on 12 February 1958, that 'one of our difficulties in the area is the apparent inability of the Governor to take any other view than an entirely narrow and parochial one of his own small area'. He added, 'It also seems doubtful to me whether he has yet hoisted in the fact that Heath [the Commander, British Forces Arabian Peninsula] is no longer his own "personal commander" but has responsibilities far outside Aden'. (CO1015/2027). There were also arguments about the deployment of British troops in subduing dissidents within the WAP, with the Governor insisting that the military concentrate on the outer frontiers and leave the APL to deal with internal dissidents. These sort of disputes, that had never existed before, were to remain throughout the rest of the British presence in Aden reflecting the fact that the troops in Aden were now not simply a local garrison, but a part of a military base with a wider responsibility.

[108] CAB/129/104.

were in South Arabia during this period recognise this with hindsight, and even identified it as the main reason for the debacle.[109] Whilst with hindsight, speaking in a television interview in 1984,[110] Trevaskis agreed that the decision to move the base to Aden was wrong, there is no evidence that he had raised any objection to this when it was being decided. Indeed, the exchange of letters between Trevaskis and Julian Amery in the period 1954-56 suggests that the two were co-operating to turn Aden 'into a real centre of British influence'[111].

However, the folly of setting up a base in an environment that was hostile to it soon became evident, and by 1965 British politicians were agonising about the impossibility of keeping a military base in the middle of a population that did not want it, which necessitated that it spent most of its energy defending itself rather than projecting power forward, as it was meant to. But for several years the idea of the need to stay in Aden at all costs became embedded in British thinking. [112]

In the best analysis at the time of the situation, Gillian King in an extended Chatham House Paper published just before Labour came to power in 1964, distinguished between a base and a garrison – the first needed for forward projection, the latter for local purposes.

[109] This question was put to several senior officials interviewed in 1984 for Granada's "End of Empire" documentary. All, with hindsight agreed that the decision to put a large military base in Aden was wrong; BFI-EE/T. For example interviews with Kennedy Trevaskis (Item 39); Mohamed Farid al Awlaqi (Foreign Minister of the Federation of South Arabia) (Item 26); Samuel Falle (Item 27); Denis Healy (Item 28).

[110] Trevaskis; BFI-EE/T (Item 39).

[111] TREV/I/5/2

[112] The usefulness and operability of the Aden base was never properly tested. The sole military achievement of Middle East Command throughout its short history in Aden was the deployment to Kuwait during the "crisis" there in 1961. This was at the time hailed as a success story and often quoted as an example of why the Aden base was so important. With hindsight however the political cost of having the Aden base for that single "success" of power projection is questionable. Furthermore there is now an increasing body of opinion, supported also by archive material including telegrams from the British Consulate General in Basra, that thinks that the threat to Kuwait in 1961 was a false alarm and that the Iraqi Army was not poised to invade, despite the sabre rattling of President Qassem and the rest of the Iraqi leadership. These opinions are well summarised in Simon C Smith (1999) Chapter 6. Mawby (2001) says that the JIC had been put in charge of assessing the threat from Iraq, but in the run up to the June 1961 crisis was relying primarily on human intelligence. For several weeks military reconnaissance could not locate the armoured regiment that was supposed to be spearheading the Iraqi invasion. Military analysts later raised many questions regarding the military success of that deployment, which cost around £1 million, and in which not a single shot was fired, since a large part of the force succumbed to heat exhaustion within days of their arrival. See for example King (1964), pp14-15.

King argues that there could be two possible justifications for the need to use Aden as a base: as part of Britain's global commitment, which the 1962 Defence White Paper had attributed to it as one of three global British military hubs (the other two being Britain itself and Singapore); and the second as a base for the protection of British oil interests in the Persian Gulf. King said:

> In strategic terms the base is badly placed for any independent role that the United Kingdom could legitimately expect to play. Forces from home or from Singapore could better meet such dwindling obligations as remain her sole responsibility at the strategic level, as the recent excursions to East Africa, Malaysia and Cyprus have shown. As for the protection of the Persian Gulf and its oil, both the oil and the sheikhdoms must in future be protected either by a small force or not at all. There is no need to provide for landing large forces in the Persian Gulf Area.[113]

As came to be widely accepted later the establishment of the base in Aden created a sharp reaction amongst the local Arab population. The base therefore had to spend most of its time and effort performing the role of a garrison and helping in subjugating the insurgency around it.

Conclusion.

The peculiar arrangement linking Britain to its informal empire in Arabia provided an opportunity for a different process of disengagement than in other parts of the empire. That in turn was justified by the perceived importance of the region to the economic well-being of the metropole. For a short while, however, the ends got confused with the means. Over two decades Britain pursued its objectives through processes of modernisation, managed emancipation, elite manipulation, federalisation, regionalisation and militarisation to secure its ends. Its success or otherwise will be discussed in the subsequent four chapters.

[113] King (1964), pp92-3.

Chapter 2. "The men on the spot" – Britain's last Pro-Consuls in Arabia: prestige versus pragmatism.

A small group of men oversaw Britain's largely informal empire in Arabia, and continued to play a crucial role in shaping the territories in their care and their future till the end, often long after their counterparts in Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of the world had packed their bags and returned home. Respected for their knowledge of the local language, religion and customs, they were able to exploit the ambiguous nature of the arrangements that connected the territories with the metropole, and the peculiarities that ensued from this, not simply to implement policy, but often to shape it. The nuanced but important differences in their personalities, and overall approaches to the issues at hand, helped define the states that subsequently emerged once Britain withdrew, making their role considerably more significant than that of simple intermediaries. Officials throughout the British Empire were expected to show initiative, and were often allowed a lot of leeway in the style of their administration. In Arabia this freedom of action, and London's reliance on the locally based officials and their expertise, was often more distinct.[114]

An orientalist view, that these were special and exceptional places that needed to be treated differently and required special skills, prevailed. This considerably narrowed down the choice of who could be deployed to them. It also re-enforced the view that there were factors at play here that only specialists could understand, and it was best to let them get on

[114] There were two major constraints on the "men on the spot". The first was financial. As Governor Johnston soon realised, 'Anything with even the smell of extra expense to the British Government about it must be reported in the greatest detail, and several times, I may say, before anything can be expected to happen.' (Johnston, 1964, p183). The second constraint was on the use of the military. Obviously the military could engage within established standard operating procedures, but larger operations had to be referred back to London, and in some cases Parliament had to be informed.

with it. This view became increasingly challenged as the decade progressed, but never faded away completely.

2.1 The "thin white line" in Arabia.

The 'thin white line' that held the British Empire together was, 'exiguous to the point of disbelief'.[115] Kirk-Greene argues that despite this it was never imperceptible or ineffective, due to four factors: coercion, collaborators, confidence and competence. In South Arabia and the Persian Gulf, the British presence on the ground was for most of the time very thin indeed, except for the colony of Aden,[116] and the four factors were at play even more so than in other British possessions.

The organisation of British rule in the Aden Protectorates up to 1958 consisted of only a handful of men, led by two political agents, one based in Aden responsible for the Western Protectorate (WAP), and the other one based in Mukalla responsible for the Eastern Protectorate (EAP). Their numbers had risen as a result of the first attempts to implement the "forward policy", led by Ingrams in the EAP in the 1930s, and from two in 1934 they had reached twelve by 1941.[117] The creation of the South Arabia Federation, and the advent of state-building in late 1950s, resulted in a rapid increase in the number of officials: Political Officers, Assistant Political Officers and some technical and professional staff, many formally on secondment to the Federation government, and some with dual roles as part of the administration of the Aden colony. Their numbers were however in the dozens, not hundreds. In the Trucial States, posts often consisted simply of a political agent or officer, and a couple of Arab clerks – usually Sudanese or Jordanian – who doubled as translators and fixers.

[115] Kirk-Greene (1980), p38.

[116] In Aden British officials headed all the key departments. The 1958, the Colonial Office List names thirty five people in the Civil Establishment of the Colony from the Chief Secretary to the Manager responsible for electricity. There were many others in more junior positions.

[117] Dresch (2000), p35.

In Muscat and Oman, the senior British representative was a diplomat holding the title of Consul-General. He reported to the British Resident in the Persian Gulf based in Bahrain. The Resident also oversaw the work of the British Political Agencies in Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai (with responsibility for the Northern Emirates) and Abu Dhabi (where the position was upgraded from that of a Political Officer to Political Agent in 1961). In theory, all officials in Aden and the protectorates reported to London through the Governor (High Commissioner) of Aden to the Colonial Secretary, and those in Muscat and Oman and the Persian Gulf through the Resident in Bahrain to the Foreign Secretary. In practice, there was a lot of direct official communication between all posts, and London, and at least in one case (that of Trevaskis) personal and unofficial communication of a substantial nature with ministers.

It is however not possible to pigeon-hole the "men on the spot" in Arabia in one simple category, even if they often shared many features in terms of background, education and skills. Up to 1947 all the posts were manned by the Indian Civil Service or by officers of the army of the Raj. Thereafter, those territories under the supervision of the Foreign Office were staffed mainly by "Arabists"; the Colonial Office had in its wisdom put Aden under its Central African Department and it was manned by people from that section of the colonial service. After 1956, many came from the Sudan Political Service.[118] Some stand out through the sheer strength of their personalities, which they often used to push their different visions. Foremost amongst these were Kennedy Trevaskis and William Luce, even though the two were also very unlike each other in many ways. Others saw themselves as an extension of the

[118] The Sudan Political Service was something of an elite within the colonial elite. Because Sudan was ostensibly an Anglo-Egyptian Condominium it was felt that it would not be appropriate to staff it from the general Colonial Service, and a separate Sudan Political Service was established in 1901. It attracted some of the best recruits from among the young Oxbridge graduates, and often a young 25 year old would after a quick induction be deployed to manage a province the size of Wales, with little to support him except his wit. An enlightened policy to spread education meant that Sudan had some of the better-educated people in Africa. The Sudan Political Service was small and tightly knit, it took only between seven and ten recruits in each year. Several found themselves in South Arabia after Sudan became independent in 1956. Apart from Luce, one of Trevaskis' closest assistants in the WAP, Robin Young also came from this service, as did earlier Colonel Boustead. A sprinkle of Sudanese could be found also doing jobs of junior bilingual clerks in many British outposts in the region.

Whitehall bureaucracy whose duty it was to wield the untidy situation over which they presided into a proper and orderly context. Charles Johnston, Stewart Crawford and Geoffrey Arthur fall in this category. Humphrey Trevelyan, the last High Commissioner in Aden, and Geoffrey Arthur, the last Resident in the Gulf, had clear missions: to close down the shop. Richard Turnbull, as a non-Arabist was considered an "outsider", appointed by an incoming Labour government, who nonetheless disappointed by being too easily nativised by the Aden Secretariat.

Several dozen men filled the more junior ranks, often working alone in remote areas with lots of scope for individuality and eccentricity. They were often young and inexperienced, but not all. In 1961, Colonel Hugh Boustead was transferred from Mukalla (EAP) to Abu Dhabi to head the newly upgraded Political Agency there long after his retirement age[119], replacing Oliver Miles who was sent there as a floater on his first posting fresh from Oxford and Shemlan, the Foreign Office Arabic language school in Lebanon (MECAS)[120] from where many of the other political officers also came.[121]

Apart from a few exceptions these men can be categorised as Arabists (sometimes referred to as "the camel corps" in informal Foreign Office jargon). They were however, again with a few exceptions, a different mould of orientalist than T.E. Lawrence or St John Philby. They did not dress in Arab attire, and their knowledge of Arabic was often less than perfect. The style of their administration also varied, as did their skills.

[119] Moorhouse (1977) says 'No figure in British diplomacy for a long time has been as eccentric as Sir Hugh Boustead……When Boustead was the bossman in Abu Dhabi in the 1960s he would summon junior diplomats with a code of blasts on a policeman's whistle.' p250.

[120] MECAS, The Middle East Centre for Arab Studies was established in Jerusalem in 1944 and later moved to the village of Shemlan in the Lebanese Shouf Mountains. A picture of life at MECAS and the challenges faced by the institution is found in Craig (1998).

[121] Those earmarked to serve in the Persian Gulf were given 'Gulf related training at MECAS, such as tuition in what were inaccurately called the Laws of the Persian Gulf'. Patrick Wright (2010), p59.

Only one person, William Luce, ever occupied both of the two senior positions, that of Governor of Aden and Resident in Bahrain. Trevaskis was for nearly a decade the Political Agent in the WAP, and subsequently became High Commissioner.

The choice of the last six Governors/High Commissioners of Aden reflected the fast changing fortunes of the Colony. Tom Hickinbotham had come to Aden in 1931 from the Indian Civil Service and initially hated it[122]. He served as an aide to the first Governor, Sir Bernard Reilly who persuaded him to stay on, and gradually he rose through the ranks until becoming Chairman of the all-important Aden Port Authority, at a time when the life of the Port was the life of Aden. His move to Government House was natural and non-controversial. As a disciple of Reilly, it was also natural that he would endorse the "forward policy" that Reilly had initiated, finding a ready and keen supporter in the newly arrived political officer in the WAP, soon-to-be Agent, Kennedy Trevaskis. The revival of the "forward policy" stirred the ire of the Imam of Yemen, and this was further aggravated with the first moves in 1954 to establish in the WAP a British-led Federation. Both threatened the status quo that the Imam disliked but to which he had largely acquiesced. The policies also alienated the more progressive elements amongst the sultans.

The appointment of William Luce in 1956, fresh from his success as part of the team that had, despite difficult odds, led Sudan to independence, reflected London's realisation that the Governorship of Aden had become more than just simply running a port. Managing relations with Yemen and maintaining the only British Colony in the Middle East in the face of increasing Arab nationalism required the skills that Luce had. Luce's early years as Governor were characterised by a refreshing open-mindedness – including an attempt to engage with the trade union movement. However, his style soon became increasingly

[122] Sir Bernard Reilly recalls that about a week after Hickinbotham's arrival he told him 'he did not like the look of Aden, the look of its people, and in fact anything about it, and that he wished to be sent back to India', Hickinbotham (1962) page x.

autocratic and in many ways Luce oversaw the decisions from which Aden's later problems developed. Even if one takes into account that Britain's overall position in the Middle East was much worse in 1960 than it was at the start of 1956, the fact remains that Luce was the last Governor to have options to choose from, options that could make a difference to and determine the future. By the time he left Aden in 1960, the die had already been cast. Caught between his hardline deputy in the WAP (Trevaskis) and his hardline political master in London (Amery), Luce the pragmatic, especially in the crucial year 1958-59, went with the flow.

Luce was succeeded in 1960 by the diplomat Charles Johnston, the last person to hold the title Governor, before the post being re-designated as the High Commission of South Arabia on 18 January 1963. Whilst not a novice to the rough and tumble politics of the Middle East, with his interests in art, and his noble Georgian wife, he may have been better-suited for a genteel European capital. Johnston's approach was to act as the chairman of a board, and to be, as he quaintly puts it, 'the totem pole' around which his team could rally.[123] By this time the forays of the Governor outside the Colony of Aden were rare, set-piece events, and Johnston spent most of his time in the company of the increasing numbers of British military officials that had recently made Aden their home.

Appointing Trevaskis as his successor seemed a natural choice. As the architect of the Federation project, it would have been logical to assume that he would be the right person to bring it to its final fruition. Yet with hindsight this appointment seems to be a major error, for which Duncan Sandys was most likely, personally responsible. Trevaskis himself says that he was offered the job of Governor in a meeting with Sandys. 'The offer came as a surprise. It is not usual for a colonial Governor to come from the service of the territory to which he is appointed. Also in my own case it was clearly questionable whether my long and intimate

[123] Johnston (1964), p173.

association with the Federal ministers, as their adviser, might not prove a liability when it came to ironing out the continuing differences between them and their Adeni colleagues.'[124] Nonetheless he accepted. Trevaskis had been effectively in control of the WAP for nearly a decade. He was deeply embroiled in all its problems. He had been a divisive leader who had alienated big chunks of society. In Aden, his position was even worse, since he was perceived to be anti-Aden and in favour of the sultans. He neither understood nor cared about the Eastern Protectorate – never visiting once during his "Governorship". For Trevaskis, Aden was always too sophisticated for its own good. He sought to subdue it using the same methods of subterfuge that he had used in the WAP, with equally disastrous results. His dismissal by the Labour Government within weeks of it taking office was not the result of some ideological witch-hunt as is sometimes suggested, but a realisation that Britain had been sucked into one of its worst imperial misadventures, and that Trevaskis was not the one to remedy this.

Labour's attempt to recalibrate British policy in Aden in 1964 was well intentioned, as was its appointment of Richard Turnbull as the new High Commissioner. As Governor, he brought Tanganiyka successfully and peacefully to independence. He was by no means a soft touch, as his record in Kenya where he was Minister of Defence and Internal Security during the Mau-Mau rebellion showed, and as he would prove also in Aden. Labour attempted to redress the Trevaskis factor by seeking somebody from outside the obvious inner-circle. Indeed the search for Governor was taken outside the Colonial Office and was led by the Defence Secretary, Healey – a reflection probably of Labour's distrust of the Colonial Office that it had inherited.[125] Yet even so, Labour's mistake was to have underestimated the extent to which the rot had set in Aden by this point, including in the administration of the colony. Turnbull quickly succumbed to the pressure of the tightly knit establishment that Trevaskis

[124] Trevaskis (1968), p193
[125] This is discussed in detail in Baker (2010), p304.

left behind and became the spokesman for the policies he was sent out to change. The most senior non-military British officials in Aden were to a large extent moulded by Trevaskis, and remained loyal to him. They, particularly Robin Young, had little regard for Turnbull; Young refers to him in his diaries as 'crumble'.[126] There is no doubt that they were putting him under considerable pressure. A telling exchange of messages between Turnbull and Labour's new Colonial Secretary, Anthony Greenwood, immediately after the suspension of the Aden Constitution in September 1965 exposes the dilemma the two men were caught in. Greenwood had not backed Turnbull's recommendation to suspend the Constitution. Writing the day after the constitution was suspended, Turnbull told Greenwood, 'I realise how distasteful this exercise upon which we are now involved must have been for you to have to take. I should like to assure you of my sympathy and to assure you that we shall not be taking our eye off the ultimate goal of independence under a liberal constitution.'[127] Greenwood replied, 'I am so grateful for the terms of your telegram Personal Number 1047. You are much in my thoughts in a period which imposes such heavy burdens upon you,' and then enigmatically adds, 'I will do anything I can to help in any staff difficulties you have'.[128]

Turnbull's tenure in Aden was marked by open insurgency, and dominated by the issue of direct rule. Britain's options further narrowed down as a result of these circumstances and Turnbull simply had to make the best of what had fast become an impossible situation.

The appointment of Humphrey Trevelyan as the last Pro-Consul in Aden signified Britain's recognition of the reality of the situation, even if it came far too late. Whilst also an Arabist and a seasoned diplomat, Trevelyan had over the years questioned British government policy, and as Ambassador in Cairo, and later in Baghdad, had advocated a

[126] Baker (2010), p339.
[127] Turnbull to Greenwood 25 September 1965 PREM 13/113.
[128] Greenwood to Turnbull 28 September 1965 PREM 13/113.

policy of engagement with Arab nationalism, and Nasser in particular. In Aden, Trevelyan's remit was not to perpetuate British rule, as had been the case with all his predecessors, but on the contrary he was called back from retirement by George Brown to organise a rapid and orderly British exit. Unlike Turnbull, Trevelyan went to Aden with his own team, and diplomats were roped in from posts as far away as Kuala Lumpur to assist him.[129] One of them was Oliver Miles, who describes Trevelyan as an extraordinary man with rich human characteristics, whilst being also a shrewd and tough negotiator.[130] Trevelyan also helped boost the morale of the remaining British personnel in Aden. He went 'out and about to meet troops and civilians, unlike his predecessor who was shy.'[131]

Of the last five Residents in the Persian Gulf, William Luce was by far the most important and relevant. He came to the post at a time when its significance had increased dramatically. The two that preceded him, and the two that followed him, were efficient diplomats, rather than visionaries. In the 1950s, Bernard Burrows' and Humphrey Middleton's terms as Resident were mainly concerned with the increasing internal unrest in Bahrain, the process of moving Kuwait to independence, and the fallout from the Saudi claim on the Buraimi Oasis. Their approach was cautious.

Of those that followed, Robert Crawford was not an Arabist at all, having served only one posting of three years in an Arab capital, Baghdad, in the 1950s. He came to the post after a long stint in London, but had previously headed the Arabian Department, and knew the issues intimately. He later returned there as Under Secretary of State. The last Resident, Geoffrey Arthur was a linguist and an efficient bureaucrat. He had to co-habit with Luce in the latter's re-incarnation as Special Representative of the Foreign Secretary to the Persian Gulf. This is often a tricky situation, and in this case more so given Luce's strong personality,

[129] Sam Falle had just been posted there when he was recalled to go to join Trevalyan in Aden. Falle had already had some experience of Aden having been on the team of the Ministerial Mission of Lord Shackleton.

[130] Interview with Oliver Miles, recorded in 2001 for the Imperial War Museum, IWM-O, 21597.

[131] Letter to Muriel Willoughby, wife of the General Sir John Willoughby. WILL 08/128/5.

and his long association with the region. Diplomats hate it when somebody else is brought in over their head, just as they have reached their goal of ambassadorial appointment (or equivalent). For this reason, the appointment of Special Representatives is rare. On this occasion however, perhaps given the huge difference of the two personalities, the relationship was perfectly civilised.[132]

2.2 Orientalism, Imperialism or Pragmatism?

The British view of "the Arab" and of "Arabs" was tainted by an orientalist imagery, sometimes called cultural imperialism, and whilst this had started fading in the period after WWII, the process was slow and uneven, and one could still hit strong pockets of it in the British establishment.[133] Edward Said in his seminal 1978 work argued that, 'Orientalism was a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the "orient" and (most of the time), the "occident".'[134] This distinction helped create the idea of a superior "west" and its claim to a right to interpret, rule and manipulate the Orient in its own image. Orientalism had convinced westerners that understanding and dealing with the Orient required a different set of assumptions, skills and methods that could be used to understand the West. By implication, this also meant that because very few people were likely to have knowledge of these assumptions, skills and methods, it was assumed that it will be these few who will know best how to deal with the Orient and with its people.

[132] Patrick Wright, who was the Deputy Resident at the time writes, 'Sir William's appointment could well have made life awkward for the then Political Resident Geoffrey Arthur, but I know from personal contacts with both of them that there were absolutely no friction caused by any personal crossing of wires. Sir William was always supremely careful to keep Sir Geoffrey closely informed of his activities and contacts, and vice versa.' Wright (2010), p61.

[133] Ironically, one of the first bastions of "orientalist" thought within the establishment that started changing was the BBC (an institution that had helped consolidate Orientalist thinking between the two world wars), and particularly its Arabic Service that had been established in 1938. Faced with increased competition from other Arab language broadcasts the BBC had to take into account what its audience wanted. Out went the Orientalist academics and retired Foreign Service officers that had dominated the programming in the early years and in came many Arab commentators, music and entertainment programmes. Partner (1988), p125

[134] Said (2003), p2.

In his 1973 review essay of the Cambridge History of Islam, which had just been published, Roger Owen said:

> Islamic Studies have always been something of a mystery to those outside the discipline. Based on the knowledge of a number of difficult languages, and focused on the examination of the historical development of a complex religion, they have assumed the character of an esoteric rite in which only a few are skilled enough to take part. They proceed according to their own, often hidden, rules; each new publication is a tactful reminder to the uninitiated that his role is to listen, to wonder, but never to ask questions or to suggest that there might be an alternative way of doing things. [135]

Paul Gore-Booth, who headed the Foreign Office as its PUS from1965-69, said that an 'Arabist', would try 'to put himself into the mind-set of the Arabs and not to become an Arab or behave like one but to be able to predict or judge how Arabs would react in certain circumstances.'[136]

To what extent did Orientalism colour the view of British officialdom towards the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula throughout the period of British rule, and crucially in its last decade? Mawby's important article on the Aden insurgency[137] argues that, in that moment at least, it did. Mawby cites intelligence reports to suggest that information was being interpreted in a way that 'underestimated the potency of local agents and exaggerated the influence of external manipulation'. Furthermore, British military strategy was characterised by a punitive policy designed to discipline the subject population. And finally, he says that decision-making was predicated on a series of stereotypes about the role of leadership in Arab societies and the overestimation of the effectiveness of local rulers as agents of British influence. Mawby based his analysis primarily on the records of the Joint Intelligence Committee.[138]

[135] Roger Owen (1973), pp287-298.
[136] Quoted in Dudley Edwards, (1994), p10.
[137] Mawby (2010).
[138] ibid.

Whilst Mawby suggested that what existed was a clouded process of analysis feeding upwards into the decision-making process, one can see also key decision-makers on the ground reading the situation through an orientalist prism, thus influencing the analysis and reducing it simply to a tool that re-enforced, rather than counter-balanced, preconceived ideas. Central to both these approaches is the way that the rulers and the ruled were considered quite differently, although both looked at with a generous degree of patronising contempt. 'Our protégés', as Luce called the rulers, needed to be dealt with firmly. Indeed 'firmness' was a feature throughout the relationship – be it in the form of a gunboat destroying the rulers' palace in Ras al Khaimah[139], the RAF dropping a few bombs on a village in the Hadhramaut whose head had transgressed[140], or a recalcitrant ruler or two being deposed as in Sharjah.

The ruled on the other hand were seen as being quite incapable of any decision, and certainly not worthy of a say in the governing of their own affairs. When elections, were held, as in Aden, the objective was not to empower the population, the majority of whom remained disenfranchised throughout, but to legitimise British action in the eyes of the world.

It is possible to see malice in the British approach, and some examples of this are evident too. But that would be an oversimplification. However, the patronising attitude is striking. Most of the time one can sense a genuine duty of care, but of the sort usually reserved for a child or an invalid incapable of looking after themselves. This also explains the attitude of Trevaskis, Amery and Sandys and their concern for 'our friends'[141] once the arrangements in Aden and South Arabia started unravelling. It also explains the sense of guilt and betrayal that comes across in some of the literature by otherwise hard-hearted men. It explains why Prime Minister Edward Heath wanted to send flowers to the former Sultan of

[139] As happened several times in the early 19th century.

[140] Aerial proscription was considered an efficient and cheap way of policing the Aden Protectorates from as early as the 1920s, since moving troops overland was always hazardous, not least because of the geographical terrain.

[141] A reference to the Sultans who had backed the Federation of South Arabia.

Oman days after the British government had unceremoniously deposed him,[142] and why Amery wrote of 'British betrayal' when the Sultan died soon after.[143]

Orientalist discourse has sometimes been likened 'to a pair of eyeglasses we unconsciously wear which acts as a filter that determines how what we take to be reality looks like to us, what we see (or do not see) and how we see it, foregrounding certain things and rendering other things invisible and determining what the things we do perceive mean to us.'[144] There was such a tainted vision in the British approach to the region in this period, as can be seen by examining three documents written by three British officials who are central to this story: William Luce, Charles Johnston and Kennedy Trevaskis. The documents of Luce and Johnston are the customary valedictories that they sent to the Foreign Office at the end of their term, in 1963 and 1966 respectively. Trevaskis' was a public paper, written two years after his retirement.

Charles Johnston was uncomfortable with the term Orientalist or Arabist. Whilst having served in key diplomatic posts in the Arab world throughout his diplomatic career Johnston claims that he is neither,

> at the end of seven years in Arabia I am all too conscious of being in no way an expert about the Arabs. This is a shaming admission to have to make, so I may as well come out with it at once. My picture of them is empirical, the impressions picked up by a non-specialist diplomat more familiar with Western Europe than with anywhere else. Pitched into Arabia in middle age, as Ambassador to Jordan, then Governor then High Commissioner, I found that my jobs far from allowing me to Arabise myself, demanded instead a certain Englishness. I have an instinctive liking and sympathy for the Arabs, but my view of them is frankly, a hundred per cent insular and British. After so many years among them, I still speak their language haltingly; I have never worn Arab clothes; I dislike eating on the floor.[145]

[142] Downing Street to the FO dated 12 August 1970, RofO, Volume 5 (1970), p47.

[143] Handwritten draft note from Julian Amery, then Minister of State at the FCO to his private Secretary Marek Goulding. Amery says of Sultan Said 'I doubt if anyone could have made a better job of ruling Muscat over the last forty years, even if his methods were not altogether fashionable. He saw the money coming and was I think rather baffled by the difficulty of spending it efficiently. As Mr Hawley says he put his trust in the British and it is sad that it should have been misplaced'. The note is undated but seems to have been written very shortly after the death of ex Sultan Said in 1972. AMEJ 1/9/22.

[144] Lockman (2010), p186.

[145] Johnston (1964), p9.

This is somewhat odd, because Johnston's *Who's Who* entry shows that in his diplomatic career up to that point he had spent three years in Cairo, as well as seven years in Arabia, whilst he had only spent three years in Madrid and one year in Bonn. Married to a Georgian princess, and a reader of Lermontov, it could be that Johnston did not enjoy his time in Arabia, and was something of a reluctant Orientalist. Johnston was irritated when on his appointment as Governor the press had described him as a fluent Arabic speaker. He says

> The Times and the Daily Telegraph have built me up as a tremendous Arabic-speaker, which I am not and never will be. My Arabic is hopelessly Anglo-Egyptian, Gezirah Sporting Club, shufti-bint, whiskey-soda kebir.[146]

This issue becomes important when we examine the decision-making process regarding Aden and South Arabia, and raises questions concerning Johnston's aloofness with regards to WAP matters and the extent to which he deferred to Trevaskis and others who claimed to know the Arabs better than him at a crucial moment in South Arabia's history. If Johnston, with his long experience of work in the Middle East deferred to the orientalist Trevaskis, because somehow he knew and understood things that Johnston did not, then one could imagine how much more deferential the officials in the Colonial Office in London were, used to dealing with the traditional colonies, but with little experience of the Arabs.

On the other hand both Trevaskis and Luce fit the archetypal image of the Arabic speaking British official, familiar with all the traditions and customs of the east, even if neither felt the need to prove this by dressing in Arab dress, *a la* Lawrence. All three see Arab traits which they respect, but all three also do this with an arrogant contempt of the weaknesses which, as they sometimes say, and sometimes imply, makes the colonial power not only superior but indispensable.

Charles Johnston's valedictory[147] is perhaps most important for the way it articulates the three stages leading up to a British privileged position with a post-independence Arab

[146] Ibid, p21.

state, a process that failed abysmally in South Arabia but worked (and still works) almost seamlessly in the Gulf. Based on his previous experience as Ambassador to Jordan, immediately before his Aden appointment, Johnston said:

> The British connection with Arab territories shows a certain normal pattern of development. The first stage is a colonial relationship: Colony, protectorate or mandate. This is succeeded by a period of independence conditioned by a treaty of Alliance under which Britain retains de jure an exclusive status of one sort or another. (I distinguish this type of treaty from those of protection and advice which belong in the first stage, i.e. to the protectorate.) The last phase comes with the abrogation of the treaty and the establishment of a normal diplomatic relationship which however need not preclude a special position of de facto type.

This sober, rational strategy is justified based on the assumption that the Arabs are somehow "different". Two ideas underpin Johnston's thinking. First that democracy was alien to the Arab mind, and second that the Arab will be dependent on the West for many years to come.

> The job of a governor is to govern, and of a British governor to govern on the principles of Westminster and Whitehall. Unfortunately however Arabs and, I suspect other races, cannot be governed on these principles. For Westminster, the Arabs are too violent; for Whitehall not sophisticated enough. What is needed is the firm hand and the broad brush, i.e. exactly those qualities which under the necessary conditions of parliamentary control from home cannot be applied.

And:

> Local nationalist leaders are encouraged into excesses by the belief that they can tease and frighten a colonial governor through their Parliamentary and press contacts at home. The Governor on his side is squeezed in a painful dilemma between the local requirements for summary action if order is to be maintained, and the need of the British government to justify its policies in parliament. In addition the last phase of a colonial regime – the one we are in here now – presents a special problem of conscience for the Governor and his British staff in the need to reconcile the traditional high standards of British Colonial administration with the devious political requirements of local Ministers.

[147] Valedictory Reflections of Sir Charles Hepburn Johnston, 26 August 1963, reproduced in PDAW, Volume 15, pp519-528.

Earlier discussing the impossibility of Aden voting in favour of joining the Federation he writes:

> This seeming illogicality is due to the strain of volatility, civic cowardice and sheer contrariness in the Arab character, which in the rare really free elections held in Arab countries, for example Jordan in 1956, had led to the triumph of irrational and incapable extremists devoted to a policy directly opposed to the interests of the country. (Indeed in moments of discouragement one is tempted to think that the strongest reason of all for granting early independence to South Arabia is the need to enfranchise its inhabitants from the conceptions of Westminster which are wholly alien and unsettling to the Arabs and to leave them free to work out their own salvation without the benefit of British political theory).

But Johnston also saw a silver lining:

> It may be thought that this is all very cynical and pessimistic. One must however try to see human nature, and Arab nature, as they are. The middle distant prospect is certainly gloomy. Nevertheless the Arab has assets which should not be overlooked. At least with him one is dealing with the product of an ancient civilisation and an admirable religion, with an individual who, however backward he may be materially, is usually integrated and free from sentiments of inferiority. (By contrast a Black African always strikes me as more like a Neapolitan ice – one layer of tribalism and witch doctoring, one of missionary Christianity, one of Afro-Asian anti colonialism or Marxism or whatever else it may be; you never know on which layer he is operating, nor does he.) About the Arabs my long term impression is rather optimistic. In time they will get over the tank as they got over the rifle. They will continue muddling along somehow. For years to come however they will need on a basis of free association and equal partnership, an intelligent helping hand from outside. Provided the helping hand can be western, and as far as possible British, the prospects need not be regarded as too depressing.

Johnston was an establishment heavyweight and his views were carefully noted in Whitehall. Indeed, on receiving Johnston's despatch Macmillan noted to Lord Home, the Foreign Secretary: 'It seems to me to be a brilliant document which deserves to be acted upon.' [148]

Luce's 1966 valedictory[149], written in quite a different style, argues for a long-term approach that would see Saudi Arabia assume the role of hegemon in the region, practically

[148] Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary 2 September 1963 T298/63 reproduced in PDAW, Aden 1899-1967, p529.

[149] Sir William Luce, Valedictory despatch, 18 July 1966, LUCE, G2.

absorbing the Trucial Coast sheikhdoms, and in many ways replacing Britain in the rest. However he warns against announcing a day for withdrawal and says that he sees continued British presence continuing for 'not less than ten years'.

Luce saw the future as being with the ruling families, but warns that 'Above all, we must be prepared to deal drastically with any ruler whose conduct proves incorrigibly harmful to the interests of the whole region.'

> If the Sheikh of Ras al Khaimah, who is at present outwardly friendly but not to be trusted, should encourage Egyptian penetration into his country to a dangerous extent, we must be prepared to deal with him as firmly as we did with the later Ruler of Sharjah.
>
> The five petty sheikhdoms of the Northern Trucial Coast…are poverty stricken and too small ever to become viable entities; there are few differences between their peoples, but the jealousies and pretensions of their Sheikhs are a constant source of friction and dispute, and as we saw in the case of Sharjah last year, can be a real danger to the security of the whole Gulf.

The choice of words to describe the rulers captures the tone: of Qatar it speaks of the 'Extravagance of the ruling family'; Sheikh Shakhbut, the Ruler of Abu Dhabi is described as 'unbalanced and inept' and his government 'disreputable and wholly inadequate' and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman is seen as 'innately cautious and isolationist'.

There were harsh words for everybody working against the British interests. Nasser was 'destructive, not constructive'; the Arab nationalists of Aden, 'small and isolated'. He adds:

> It is true that common fear of Nasserism would be the strongest cement binding the component parts of the Arabian bloc together; but the threat must be external, for once the poison of subversion and instability is firmly established in any part of the body it will spread, and no cure is likely to be effective.

Trevaskis' paper[150] starts with a rebuke for those 'who use emotionally evocative terms such as "nationalism" and "feudalism" which thoughtlessly stimulate prejudice when what is needed is analytical objectivity.' It then sets out the problem in these terms: 'What

[150] Trevaskis (1966).

lies at the root of the problem of South Arabia's or indeed, the Yemen's future is not, as many imagine, the exuberant nationalism of an urban intelligentsia but the ever-present menace to political stability of a tribal population, which is allergic to control and, being poor, ignorant and generously equipped with modern firearms, is capable of the most damaging mischief.' Trevaskis then continues to explain why no solution will work except the one that he himself had originally conceived fifteen years earlier, namely a Federation led by the tribal rulers.

This was a favourite theme of Trevaskis that recurs in other writings. On 29 May 1961, whilst still Resident Adviser and Agent for WAP, he wrote to his Assistant Advisers:

> …I have been castigated – by no means for the first time – for "backing the wrong horse". Our critics who are usually out here on short visits from London or are otherwise remote from the hurly burly of our politics, tell one that they are surprised to find us repeating the mistake we have made in other parts of the Middle East and elsewhere. They then state that we ought to be supporting the "progressives and the nationalist" leaders instead of effete traditional aristocrats. Set in the context of countries like Egypt and Iraq this may make sense but there are obvious dangers in stereotype off-the-peg thinking which leads to unthinking assumptions that labels ("decadent and moribund aristocracy", "progressive nationalist leaders" and so forth) which may be apt in one environment are necessarily so in another.
>
> If then it is a mistake to back traditional aristocrats whom should we be supporting? Presumably those who are in opposition to the leaders we are supporting. But who are they? They are first the traditional aristocrats who have quarrelled with us like Ali Abdulkerim, Muhammed Aidrus and the Naqib of Mausetta. Secondly there are other traditional aristocrats like Muhamed Bubakr and the Amir Haidera who are the present rulers' rivals; and finally there are the Jiffris. Though most of them pay lip service to nationalism, and one or two like the Jiffris and Mohammed Aidrus may be genuine nationalists one cannot get away from the fact that all of them are in their different ways cast in the same traditional and aristocratic mould as the leaders we are now supporting. Even the Jiffris who most closely resemble the kind of progressive nationalists our critics have in mind only have any real influence amongst the Aulaqis and that they owe to the traditional position of their family in Yeshbum.
>
> The fact of the matter is that the society we have here still looks for its leaders to the classes which are traditionally associated with leadership, and that leaders like Muhammed Aidrus, the Naqib Muhammed Bubakr and the Jiffris only command a following because they have traditional claims to leadership. Their nationalist pretensions obtain them Egyptian sympathy and the material aid with which to purchase support. Otherwise it counts for very little. We have then the choice between backing traditional leaders who are prepared to be our friends and those who are not. The fact that we prefer the former, and in choosing our friends, sometimes lose the

> friendship of their rivals does not seem to me to constitute any case for our "backing the wrong horse".[151]

In Trevaskis' handbook[152], a manual for his staff, we also find a clear assertion that it was only a few hotheads that were creating problems, and that if they could be taken out everything will be fine, since left on its own the population at large was fully compliant with British rule. Reporting on the situation in, Lower Yafa, the most populous district of WAP, Trevaskis gives details how the situation was brought back under control by collective punishment through RAF aerial bombardment, the bribing of tribal leaders with arms and ammunition, and old fashioned police arrests and harassment:

> In the Lower Yafa'i Sultanate an ugly situation was cleared equally satisfactorily. In January the Assistant Adviser had been left to recruit and organise a new administration and Tribal Guard force with the help of the rump of the State Council. The local population had been too frightened of reprisals to show the least co-operation and in any event had been disgruntled because of falling cotton prices. Mohammed Aidrus had moved his followers down towards Abyan and by carrying out nuisance raids and causing a certain amount of sabotage and damage with the aid of local sympathisers, had successfully caused widespread alarm and despondency. Urgent action was taken to restore a deteriorating situation. First some of the unadministered Kaled tribes living on the borders of Abyan were swung away from Mohammed Aidrus and by a judicious distribution of arms, were sufficiently won over to obstruct his passage to Abyan. Secondly, effective air action against the houses of Mohammed Aidrus and his principal followers coupled with the dispersal of warning pamphlets throughout Lower Yafa'i al Heid had the immediate effect of sending most of his supporters back to their homes. And thirdly, the arrest of several individuals in Abyan suspected of having taken part in or otherwise encouraged the disturbances there very soon brought about an improvement. After the flight of Seiyid Muhammad from Lahej in April the propaganda and pamphleteering which until then had supported Muhammed Aidrus ceased. By May order had been fully restored and with the new administration firmly in the saddle the local population immediately became friendly and co-operative.[153]

As we now know, the population was far from friendly and compliant, and it was exactly at this moment that the movement was created from which the National Liberation Front, led by people who were not the traditional rulers, was shortly to emerge. But Trevaskis

[151] Kennedy Trevaskis to Senior Assistant Advisors and Assistant Advisors, S/POL/3/28, 29 May 1961; Holmes, 2/2.

[152] Trevaskis, WAP Handbook 1959; TREV I/4/3

[153] Trevaskis, WAP Handbook 1959; TREV I/4/3, pp73-4.

was completely oblivious of this and had at this point convinced himself that by removing those local leaders who showed nationalistic tendencies he had contained the problem. In a long communication to his Assistant Advisers on 9 July 1960, Trevaskis starts with a triumphalist note, 'With the Ahl Subaur out of the way in Beidha, the pilgrimage season in full swing and a verdant countryside inviting the cultivator to make the most of what looks like being a splendid season, the W.A.P. has seldom been so tranquil.'[154] He concludes: 'I am off on leave next week fortified by the knowledge that things have never been so quiet and at no other time have I left here with so little fear of recall during leave. I hope I have not tempted Providence unduly by subscribing to so rash a statement.'[155]

As late as March 1962, in another missive to his subordinates Trevaskis says that ' the skies have never seemed clearer, and that 'here in the WAP we have continued to enjoy exceptional tranquillity' adding that the problem of the future was not going to be internal but what he characterises as 'international attention'.[156]

Trevaskis had dangerously positioned himself vulnerable to misreading events in the WAP, not least by excluding anybody else from being able to be anywhere near the complex web that he had darned. This included the intelligence service. As late as 1965 the Political Adviser of Middle East Command was reporting to the JIC that 'there is no Intelligence Service, properly speaking, covering and targeting the protectorate'.[157] Andrew argues that the British authorities in Aden:

> failed to learn the lessons of the Malayan insurgency more than a decade earlier. Intelligence organisation was confused and no overall Director of Intelligence was appointed until 1965. The Security Service was not asked to play a role which approached the significance of its participation in counter-insurgencies in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus. Trevaskis favoured extensive use of Special Political Action (SPA) against Arab nationalists. The Aden High Commission, he claimed, "would be

[154] Trevaskis, Secret memo to Assistant Advisoes, Holmes 2/2.
[155] ibid.
[156] Trevaskis to Senior Assistant Advisers and Assistant Advisers 26 March 1962, TREV I/5/14
[157] Interim report by the chairman of the JIC Working Party "Intelligence organisation in Aden", Annex to JIC/1061/65; CO 1035/184 quoted by Andrew (2009) p475.

> able to bring about a clash between the PSP and SAL [the rival South Arabian League] which will encourage them to slit each other's throats."[158]

Trevaskis' 1966 public paper, and his earlier confidential exchanges with his subordinates, the Colonial Office, and his political friends, are laced with insightful glimpses into tribal society in South Arabia written by an orientalist whose knowledge of the minutiae was clearly impeccable, but who, with hindsight, had deluded himself of his own success in achieving what he had in 1956 identified as the core purpose of the British presence in the WAP, namely to provide Aden with a *cordon sanitaire.*

2.3 Two sides of the same coin: Kennedy Trevaskis and William Luce -- Prestige versus pragmatism.

Writing about the British Colonial administrations in Africa, Kirk-Greene said that the District Commissioner:

> administered with the aid of an authority erected upon his own self confidence..... However misplaced or misconstrued, conscious or quite unconscious, it was a probably indispensable sense of one kind or another of superiority (cultural, moral, intellectual, socio-racial, technological or organisational know-how), at once unquestioned and unquestioning, which enabled the expatriate colonial administrator – be he experienced Commissioner or greenhorn cadet – to advise, to act, to accomplish, and indeed to be.[159]

According to Kirk-Greene, Sir Robert Coryndon had written in 1908, in the first Annual report from Swaziland,

> It is recognised that a valuable principle of Native Administration is that the desires and the measures of the government shall be carried out as much as possible by the force of personal prestige, which should be the distinguishing characteristic of native officials …. that in fact the administration of the natives should be, in a sense, by personality rather than by legislation.[160]

[158] Andrew (2009), p474.
[159] Kirk-Greene (1980), p44.
[160] Ibid.

Of all the officials involved in the British exit from Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s, William Luce and Kennedy Trevaskis stand out most. This is not just because they served in the region for a long time, and continued to be involved with it after the end of their official career, but also because the ethos that guided them, and the policies that they pursued, left a lasting impact on the region. Whilst most of the other officials implemented policy, both Trevaskis and Luce were critical in its formulation, both in office, and after.

William Luce and Kennedy Trevaskis had much in common. Although Luce was eight years older, both shared a similar background going from public school to Cambridge, and immediately after that, at 23, joining the Colonial Service – Trevaskis the mainstream Colonial Service from where he was deployed to Africa, and Luce the Sudan Political Service where he served until his appointment to Aden in 1956. He had been in Sudan for most of his adult life, since 1930. Trevaskis moved to the WAP in 1951, as a political officer, and was promoted a year later to Deputy British Agent. By the time that Luce arrived in Aden, Trevaskis had been promoted to Political Agent.[161]

Despite the similarities the two men seem to have had a very different temperament: Trevaskis comes across as more intense, and committed to British global power with a religious fervour. Luce was a much more flexible person, adapting quickly to circumstances, a virtue that saw him flow with ease from what looked like one success to another.

2.4 The archetypal imperialist: Kennedy Trevaskis and "nipping trouble in the bud".

Kennedy Trevaskis was an imperialist at a time when the Empire was in retreat. He saw his task as standing firm against encroachment, but also to make those changes, that made standing firm possible. He was thus not averse to change, so long as everything

[161] This biographical data is largely based on their Who's Who entries and on their respective entries in the ODNB.

substantially remained the same, but he was not able to deal with change that he himself did not instigate or control, let alone ride on its wave. Trevaskis did not like his colonial service posting in central Africa. According to Amery, 'he found the combination of very primitive Bantu tribesmen and rather coarse White settlers uncongenial'[162]. Trevaskis himself says it had dawned on him, when a prisoner-of-war in Eritrea during WWII, that the Empire was at its end, and that he 'had no appetite for an undertaker's task and to give the Colonial Empire a decent burial seemed all that it could offer in the years immediately after the war.' However he saw that in the Middle East there was still 'the peculiar empire where, in the main, Britain did not govern but only exercised influence through a network of treaties extending from Egypt to the Gulf and the Trucial States.'[163] After three years and several applications to the Colonial Office, Trevaskis got what he wanted, and was transferred to Aden.[164] Amery suggests that he helped him get this posting.[165]

Trevaskis and Amery met in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) in 1951, when Amery was visiting Central Africa with a Parliamentary delegation. It seems that this was their first meeting since their school days, but Amery says, 'we found each other's company congenial from the first, and we sat up much of one night talking about our respective experiences of World War II'[166].

Trevaskis was concerned that Aden was a backwater, but he was reassured by Amery, that Aden was not a backwater but 'the Gibraltar of the East'.[167] The fact that it was not became obvious to him once he arrived in Aden in 1951. Trevaskis was shocked to find a colony that was run as a business rather than a fortress outpost. By chance, or more likely by connivance, Trevaskis was attached not to the government of the colony but to the Political

[162] AMEJ 2/1/157, Forward to an unpublished book.
[163] Trevaskis, (1968) page xiii.
[164] Ibid page xiv.
[165] AMEJ 2/1/157, Forward to an unpublished book.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Trevaskis, (1968) page xv.

Agency for the WAP, a territory that he describes as 'bewildering'. He was shocked at the British neglect of the Protectorate and alarmed at events in Egypt. This was even before the 1952 Nasserist revolution, and the prospect of Egyptian nationalism becoming a pan-Arab movement. He says:

> I found it difficult to pick out any silver linings of hope in the gathering storm clouds. The deluge could be not so far away and yet in South Arabia we had nothing more substantial to shelter behind than a grotesque complex of petty, backward states and a miniscule colony. Shut away from reality in the cosy imperial warmth of the colony, British Aden carried on as usual. The curtain had gone down on the Christmas pantomime and the New Year had been celebrated in the traditional fashion with a fancy-dress dance at the club; 'the season' was not yet over and we could still look forward to race meetings at Khormaksar, the Aden Levies Officers' ball, and the Yacht Club's regatta.[168]

Trevaskis' immediate superior was the Political Agent for the WAP, Basil Seagar. In the second chapter (aptly called 'Empire-building') of his memoir, he criticised Seagar's way of working, and the way that he expressed himself both in speech and in writing[169]:

> I did not find it easy to explore Seager's mind. He rarely visited the British Agency and, comfortably attired in nothing more than an Arab loincloth, it was his practice to barricade himself in his own home behind such lengthy lists of appointments with Arab visitors that it was seldom possible to see him. And then, when one did, his mind and speech would move so rapidly, with so many digressions into incomprehensible tribal politics and with such a barrage of verbal exclamation marks, that it needed a more agile mind than mine to keep up with his thoughts.[170]

It is somewhat contradictory that whilst he was critical and dismissive of the Colonial government in Aden for being aloof from reality and caught in its Raj traditions, Trevaskis is equally critical of Seager whom he blames for going native, even if by doing so Seager probably had a much better picture of the real situation in the WAP than Trevaskis would ever have. Trevaskis' arrival in Aden coincided with the appointment of Hickinbotham as Governor. Hickinbotham was very much a part of the Aden establishment that Trevaskis

[168] ibid p16.
[169] Ibid p19.
[170] Ibid p17.

criticised. As Chairman of the Aden Port Authority he was in fact, if not in protocol, the most important person in the Colony after the Governor. Trevaskis said that Hickinbotham 'knew' the WAP because he was used to going hunting there, although there is no evidence that he understood much of the complexities of its politics and social and tribal arrangements. Trevaskis quickly started pushing for action to extend "British advice" to the frontier areas, and to bring them under British control.[171] Hickinbotham was less than enthusiastic and warned about 'stirring up a hornet's nest' but Trevaskis persisted and pushed on.[172] Whilst in their public writing both Hickinbotham and Trevaskis are courteous to each other,[173] Trevaskis in truth despised Hickinbotham. On 15 August 1956, Trevaskis wrote to Robert Serjeant at SOAS, 'We await Luce's arrival with pleasurable curiosity. From all accounts he is a nice sympathetic kind of chap, has a lot of useful experience and is unlikely to interfere unnecessarily in our affairs. The departure of his predecessor has left me, and I have no doubt, many others, with the sense of relief derived from the extraction of an aching and useless tooth. Good riddance…'.[174] Trevaskis' wife, Bunty, nicknamed Hickinbotham a 'tick-in-the-bum'.[175]

It seems Hickinbotham was oblivious to this, and in any case he gave the go ahead for the "forward policy" to be pursued with vigour and for the idea of a federation of WAP states to be developed, with very little consideration of the cost – political, financial and material that all this would entail. Of course the person to implement that policy was Trevaskis, for in the summer of 1953 Seager left on retirement, and less than eighteen months after arriving in Aden, Trevaskis as the new Political Agent was now the supremo in the WAP. Writing in 1958, Hickinbotham says although he may have thought in general terms about a federation in the WAP even before he became Governor, it was Trevaskis who had formally articulated

[171] Trevaskis (1968), p51.
[172] Ibid.
[173] For example, Trevaskis (1968), p 19; Hickinbotham (1958), p164.
[174] TREV I/5/3.
[175] Trevaskis Diary entry for 12 December 1963, TREV II/2/7.

the idea and put the scheme down on paper which eventually went to London and got the approval of the Colonial Secretary.[176] However, this early initiative never took off as it was perceived as an attempt by the British to add another layer of domination – the proposal envisaged the Governor of Aden as the head of the federation. Hickinbotham put the proposal to a meeting of rulers in January 1954, but the response was chilly. The following day Trevaskis called on the Sultan of Lahej – still then considered the *primus inter pares* amongst the local leaders, to get his reaction. Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim, did not mince his words: 'They were like surrender terms dictated to a defeated enemy! Do you think we want to become a colony of yours?'[177]

But Trevaskis had now convinced himself that whilst change was going to be inevitable in the WAP for the British position to be sustained, change could come from top down in a way that it could be managed. The son of a clergyman who had spent thirty years in India, Trevaskis absorbed his father's vision of the British Empire, its values and the way it was knitted together. He recalled:

> In talking as he invariably did, of India, my own father would build all his arguments around the term "British prestige". Once, I asked him what he meant by it. He looked puzzled and then said: "It's whatever it is that makes a million Indians in a district accept the authority of a single Englishman, who has nothing more than a handful of police at his back". This something was largely a bluff to persuade the million Indians, had they wanted to, there was nothing to be achieved by defying British authority. It rested on the painstaking practice of nipping trouble in the bud. The thinking behind it sprang from a couplet of Sadi, the Persian poet, which my father never tired of quoting: "The spring at its source may be turned by a twig. When it has grown into a river it cannot be crossed by an elephant." At the time I would smile at such quaint relics of Indian Mutiny thinking, but in 1954, as I looked over my shoulder at the Middle East, and then at what was taking place nearer at home in South Arabia, I began to understand what prestige meant and why people like my father had prized it so highly.[178]

[176] Hickinbotham (1958), p164.
[177] Trevaskis (1968), p45.
[178] Trevaskis (1968), pp52-3.

Trevaskis' approach in the WAP from 1951-63 was to 'nip trouble in the bud'. This required an expensive interventionist policy that meant Britain getting involved in the affairs of the territory in ways that it had never been before, and engaging in a process of state building that sought to allow space only for those who complied with his plans. In doing so he often over-reacted and alienated people who did not pose a serious threat to vital British interests, even if they were vocal in some of their criticisms of British policy. Despite being an Arabist and a fluent Arabic speaker, at least by the end of his tenure, Trevaskis may not have understood an important Arab characteristic, honour and face-saving, and was not ready to make allowances for either, even if the costs for not doing so were high. He understood that Arab nationalism was a force to be reckoned with, but showed little understanding of how and why.

In an internal note, entitled "Future Policy in the Western Aden Protectorate", Trevaskis declared in 1956: 'The purpose of British policy in the Western Aden Protectorate has been, and is, to provide the Colony of Aden with a friendly hinterland.'[179] This was to be achieved through the "forward policy" – in essence the process of extending British rule through "Advisory Treaties" and through federating the WAP entities.

Unlike the Treaties of protection that were similar in nature to those agreed with the rulers of the Trucial Coast, the Advisory Treaties introduced in the late 1930s were envisaged as more elaborate affairs, involving commitments by both sides. Trevaskis said that, 'They impose an obligation on the British government to advise and assist the chiefs in the good government of their subjects. In practice the margin between compulsion and advice was often invisible. The "states" were generally subject to direction by British political officers.' Trevaskis however admitted that since the British "advisory" arrangements brought no tangible advantage to the Arab chieftains this policy was increasingly failing and,

[179] TREV I/5/3.

> ...if British influence is to be maintained in the Western Aden Protectorate, measures...must first be taken to bring the Chiefs and tribes into a state of willing dependence on the British government, and that then as these measures take effect, direct British control should be withdrawn and steps should be taken to reconcile moderate nationalism with the continuance of British influence…',

adding that it was obvious that the measures he was suggesting, 'imply very substantial increases in British expenditure in the Western Aden Protectorate.... But, in brief, the position is that if the British government wishes to maintain influence in the Western Aden Protectorate it must pay for it.[180]

This theme was picked up by Trevaskis in correspondence with Amery on 7 June 1956,

> There were no political officers or Government security forces stationed in the Western Protectorate before the War; today there are eight political officers, and excluding regular military forces, about five hundred "Government Guards" or gendarmes. The function of the political officers is to advise the rulers and that of the government Guards is to lend support to the political officers. As you understand advice and compulsion has often been indivisible.[181]

Trevaskis then goes on to offer Amery two possible scenarios, either do nothing and be open to criticism from Arab nationalism, or to develop a friendly federation that can be moved slowly towards independence, but of course without Aden. Trevaskis ended with a warning, 'Drift will result in disaster. At present we are drifting.'

Trevaskis was concerned at Arab nationalist rumblings in the WAP. A few days before writing to Amery he had received a letter from his Political Officer in Lahej, Robin Young. The letter was very negative about Sultan Ali whom Young accuses of 'showing his true colours' and of 'dilly-dally[ing].... on the wrong side of the fence'. Young told Trevaskis,

> ....we should no longer allow Sultan Ali and others a free rein. They should be curbed. Sultan Ali should be officially advised to pass a new arms decree totally

[180] TREV I/5/3.
[181] TREV I/5/3.

> prohibiting the import of arms into Lahej territory except through official channels, via the colony, and secondly he should be told that anti-British speeches and actions by his advisers and officials in Lahej, and by himself too for that matter, will no longer be tolerated. With a statement on the protectorate's future emphasising that federation comes first before all else, followed by a curb on obstreperous Sultans, I think something may yet come out of Southern Arabia. If we keep drifting, as we are, we might as well pack up and the sooner the better.[182]

Robin Young's relationship with Trevaskis clearly went beyond that expected between a Political Agent and his Political Officer. Young was for Trevaskis a protégée, a confidant, a soulmate and a henchman, and as this letter shows he was prone to adding to Trevaskis' own concerns. Trevaskis pursued his vision with a single mindedness that allowed little space for weighing up other options, and left no space for those who disagreed with him. His big strategy was to create what in essence was to be nothing more than a puppet state – a federation of friendly rulers that would be given nominal independence while being completely dependent on Britain, in military, economic and financial terms.

But whilst this top down initiative with all its financial implications, was being fine-tuned by the Colonial administration, a bottom up initiative emerged around 1956, which caused Trevaskis serious concern. It was spearheaded by the same Sultan of Lahej, and had all the hallmarks of success. Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim had just taken over from his brother. His state, Lahej, was the most developed in the WAP. The young sultan had been educated at Victoria College in Cairo and was perceived as an able moderniser in the WAP, and importantly in Aden, where to this day people talk highly of him.[183] A Federation spearheaded by Lahej had all the hallmarks of success and could also be attractive to the people of Aden. However, this was not the sort of federation that Trevaskis wanted in 1956. Trevaskis hints to the moment when it occurred to him that he had a problem. He describes a

[182] Young to Trevaskis, 2 June 1956, TREV I/5/3.
[183] Shukri, Interview, October 2012.

meeting he had with Muhammed al Jiffri, a close friend and adviser of Sultan Ali and a founder of the South Arabian League, a nascent but peaceful nationalist movement.

> He wanted South Arabian unity, and independence, he said. But there were obstacles. He did not consider the Imam's claims an obstacle, for once independent, South Arabia as an Arab country would find it much easier to come to terms with him than we ever could. The real obstacle was colonialism. In the Protectorate he admitted it was minimal, but what was South Arabia without Aden? And what place in the world was more completely embalmed in colonialism than Aden.[184]

If Trevaskis was already showing signs of a siege mentality before the 1956 Suez Crisis, his concerns after Suez took paranoiac proportions, and helped define the crucial next steps. Trevaskis convinced himself of an imminent threat from Yemen. This coincided with a change of Governor. Luce, who must have been as shaken by the Suez events as the rest of the British establishment in the Middle East, arrived in Aden as the events were unfolding and was promptly presented with the "deluge" scenario by Trevaskis. In a note entitled "Issue of Government Stock Rifles 10.3.56 – 10.4.57"[185], Trevaskis writes, 'By December 1956 the threat to our authority in the WAP had become serious'. 'The Governor agreed to special operations on the Dhala, Audhali and Beihan Frontiers during December. Their main purpose was to prevent the Yemen from carrying out its plans, being in the nature of a counter attack timed to forestall the main attack expected from the Yemen.' Trevaskis says that the cost of the operation 'was not unduly large'. Annexe A to the report shows that it involved the handout of 3,048 rifles, two-thirds of which went to the Amir of Beihan. The government ran out of rifles to distribute, and had to borrow some from the small RAF contingent in Aden. Luce sent Trevaskis urgently to London with a shopping list for arms.[186] To understand the extent to which the mission had expanded, and in what direction, one needs to compare the quantity of rifles issued in this operation to what had been envisaged being issued in all of

[184] Trevaskis (1968), p38. Although there is no precise date when this conversation took place it was likely sometime in early 1956.

[185] TREV I/5/3.

[186] Luce to Colonial Office, 29 December 1956 TREV I/5/3.

1956. A report by Trevaskis entitled "Subversion in the WAP"[187] dated 8 May 1956 envisaged issuing 400 rifles for the whole of the territory, and none for Beihan since he had already been given 75. In the context of the WAP this constituted a major shift in the balance of power. Trevaskis had decided the Sharif of Beihan[188] was going to be the bedrock on which he was going to build his federation. Within months a full-scale military operation was ongoing. In a letter dated 24 August 1957 to his Assistants Trevaskis speaks of 'Special Operations which you know all about'; 'Secret weapons which you know of" and a 'tit-for-tat policy'. [189]

At best Trevaskis' concerns about Yemen can be said to have been an over-reaction. Yemen was an impoverished country and did not have the capacity to mount the sort of attack that Trevaskis seemed to envisage. The Imam was not at all popular with the leaders and people of the WAP. There were of course long-standing feuds between tribes in Yemen and tribes in the protectorate, which often meant skirmishes between them, and there had been very little British penetration in the frontier areas. It was at this point that the Sharif Hussein of Beihan[190] emerged as a key protagonist of the story, and would remain so until 1967. 'Bearded, hawk-faced, flashing eyed' he bore 'a striking resemblance to the pirate Teach' – and did 'his best to live up to this resemblance by his behaviour'[191]. His territory bordered Yemen and was therefore a frontline state. He was involved in many disputes of his own with the Imam and with the Imam's representatives in the nearby Yemeni province of Harib. The Sharif gave refuge to Yemenis who were opposing the Imam and was even suspected of being behind the assassination of the Governor of Harib and of giving sanctuary to the

[187] Appendix entitled "Statement of rifles and ammunition required for allocation to rulers", TREV I/5/3.

[188] Hussein, the ruler of Beihan is both in the manuscripts and the literature alternatively referred to as the Emir/Amir of Beihan or the Sherif/Sheriff/Sharif. In this text the term Sharif is used whenever possible.

[189] TREV I/5/4.

[190] The ruling family of Beihan constituted a branch of the Hashemites, claiming descent from the Prophet, and related to the Jordanian King. Sharif Hussein bin Ahmed was the father of the ruler, Saleh and the one with the real power.

[191] Note of Governor Johnston on visit to Beihan (Johnston 2/29).

assassin.[192] His exposed position made him particularly conscious of the benefits of the British connection, a fact fully exploited by Trevaskis. What Trevaskis may have failed to appreciate was that soon the British were to become as dependent on the Sharif of Beihan as he was on them.

Emboldened by his new crusade and by newly found friends, Trevaskis embarked on a crackdown in the WAP. By 1958 the leaders of the SAL were exiled,[193] the Sultan of Lahej was deposed, as was the de facto ruler of Lower Yafa and various other tribal chiefs. The RAF was kept busy with punitive collective punishments of villages that gave refuge to dissidents. On the other hand, those that were willing to collaborate continued to be propped up with guns and money.

Trevaskis developed his own methodology for dealing with the peculiar problems of the WAP: – the use of underhand, often illegal and unsupervised methods of subterfuge. Trevaskis' WAP staff called them "keeny meeny".[194] Reference to it in the books written by British officers who served in the WAP at the time speak of it in general terms of bribery and deception, but clearly it was more than that. It is aired a bit more in *Without Glory in Arabia*, where we are told that even within the staff of the political agency there were concerns about the methods being used, for example Roy Somerset who was 'unwilling to get involved in bribery with rifles, ammunition or money',[195] whilst the technical people 'ignored the politics

[192] Trevaskis (1968), p57.

[193] Ironically, even in this Trevaskis was not ready to be flexible. If anybody was to be deported from the WAP it was to be on his own terms and timetable. In his diary note on 8 June 1958, Trevaskis writes, 'H.E. [the Governor] proposing deport Sayed M al Jiffri and his principal fellow travellers to the Seychelles. [I] feel this is a bit premature. We should declare a liberal policy, invite co-operation and then hit anybody who is anti-British.' TREV II/2a/2.

[194] The term Keeny Meeny comes from the Swahili phrase *keeni meeni*, meaning deadly snake in long grass, and is regularly used by the SAS to describe covert, stealthy, and dangerous operations. [Spearin, p62] It is not clear if the term was coined in Aden at this time.

[195] Hinchcliffe et al. (eds) (2013), p85.

and tried to do as much as they could'.[196] Another political officer, Hugh Walker was within a month of his arrival in Aden 'appalled and repelled by British policy'.[197]

The targets of "keeny meeny" were not only the Arabs, but often the elected representatives of the British people. Trevaskis' biggest skill and ingenuity was his ability to persuade his superiors in Aden and London that he knew best, and that he had the situation under control. To do so he went to great lengths. In the summer of 1958, concerned that the Sultan of Lahej, who had gone to London to try to get support in his increasingly embattled position, might ruin his plans, Trevaskis hastily despatched to London six friendly sultans, heads of territories that he himself had two years earlier described as 'the more backward',[198] to lobby for his plan. In London there were few who could work out the difference between one Sultan and another. The strategy worked. The Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox Boyd wrote to Trevaskis on 1 July 1958:

> Last night I had the pleasure of entertaining to dinner the friendly Rulers of the Western Aden Protectorate, Audhali, Dhala, Upper Awlaqi, Fadhli Naib and Sharif Hussein. After dinner we had a short talk about one or two matters, and I am writing to let you know that the rulers, after making some eulogistic remarks about Sir William (who was present) made a particular point of expressing to me their strong confidence in and affection for yourself, and appreciation of your work for them and their people in the WAP. I promised the rulers to write and tell you of this, and they expressed their hope that I would do so. It gave me great pleasure to hear them speak in this way and I do congratulate you.[199]

Trevaskis had prepared the visit of his Sultans well. On 28th May 1958, he wrote to Amery:

> I thought you would like to know that a party of my rulers are on their way to London to air their views on our relations with the Yemen and the question of federation. With the exception of Lahej, who is already at home, they are the most important rulers in the Western Aden Protectorate. They include your old friends Sharif Hussein (and his brother Sharif Awdha) and the Audhali Sultan. Also with them are Sultan Ahmed bin Abdulla, the Fadhli and the Amir of Dhala.

[196] Ibid p81.
[197] Ibid p95.
[198] Trevaskis, "Future policy in the WAP", TREV I/5/3.
[199] TREV I/5/6.

> What has really inspired this exodus has been the publicity given at home to Lahej. As you know he is a very plausible young man and his pose of the moderate nationalist who is trying to find a rational solution to our problems is well calculated to deceive those of a liberal turn of mind. This is precisely what our friends are afraid of since they know, as well as we do that Lahej is completely sold to Nasser and that his lobbying at home has no purpose other than to weaken our position out here.
>
> They are not worried about the present government but they are decidedly uneasy that Lahej may make an impression on the opposition and that in, as they believe, the likely event of the Socialists winning the next election the next government might let them down. Because of this they want to have a chance of making their own views known, and also they want British backing to the establishment of a quasi-autonomous federation which they believe would strengthen their position locally.[200]

Not for the last time Trevaskis was stage-managing a performance using his local rulers to influence British government opinion. These rulers, who were not representative of the picture in the WAP, were also completely dependent on him for their understanding of British politics and the British government position, as well as for their political survival at home. It is inconceivable that they would have spontaneously agreed to put aside their many differences and to go to London to speak with one voice about the need for a federation. In fact, in his diary entry for 18 May 1958, Trevaskis says, of the most important person in the group, the Sharif of Beihan, 'Sharif H has at last agreed to go to the UK, but only after putting me in the position of begging him to do so.'[201]

"Managing" British politicians became a favourite Trevaskis preoccupation. Trevaskis' close lieutenant and confidant, Robin Young kept a diary, which is not in the public domain, but of which parts, at least, were seen by Peter Hinchcliffe, who also served in Aden at the time. Hinchcliffe said that a group of visiting British Members of Parliament were to 'have wool pulled over their eyes' and said that Young's diary entry for 17 June 1962,

> records how he was summoned by Ken Trevaskis, then the British Agent, to discuss the visit and to work out how best to leave the visitors with the impression

[200] TREV I/5/13.
[201] TREV II/2/2.

> that there was strong popular support for the Federation. To this end, 'spontaneous' demonstrations by crowds carrying pro Federation banners were organised in Abyan to greet the MPs.[202] The crowds composed of Federal Guard policemen, off duty members of the FRA in civilian dress, farm workers trucked in by the local authorities and anyone else who could be rounded up for the occasion. I was in charge of the 'popular' welcome in Ja'ar, the administrative capital of the Lower Yafa Sultanate and was concerned that some of the more enthusiastic (but illiterate) demonstrators had carried their banners, (which we had worked hard to manufacture) upside down![203]

Hinchcliffe, again referring to Robin Young's diary said that this was not an isolated incident.

> On another occasion in 1964, three other Labour MPs visited Abyan to see nationalist detainees suspected of involvement in the grenade attack at Aden Airport, which had targeted Trevaskis (and fatally wounded George Henderson).[204] They were jostled by a 'mob' involved in another 'spontaneous demonstration'. The crowd was protesting against the perpetrators of the bomb outrage (a number of Fadhlis, including a member of the ruling family were injured by the grenade). They were apparently "rescued" from the crowd by Stephen Day, the local Assistant Advisor, who had played a major part in organising the riot.[205]

Quite where deception stopped is not quite clear. Conveniently most of the files dealing with the Aden insurgency were burnt during the hasty British retreat in 1967, many by Young himself 'in an orgy of burning over several days in Khormaksar'[206]. Yet some idea of what was going on can be deduced from other sources. On 12 January 1965, Ali Abdul Kerim, the former Sultan of Lahej, who remained at heart an anglophile and was still in contact with British officials, had a conversation in Cairo with Leycester Coltman (sic), a third secretary at the British Embassy. The wide-ranging conversation covered a lot of ground, but at one point Abdul Kerim, speaking of the deteriorating British position in South Arabia, said,

[202] The two MPs were Labour's George Thompson and Robert Edwards.

[203] Peter Hinchcliffe, "Robin Young's Diaries" in Hinchliffe et al (ed) (2013), p156.

[204] Henderson was a senior and experienced political officer. His death was probably due to his attempt to shield Trevaskis from the impact of the grenade.

[205] Hinchcliffe et al. (eds) p156. In the same book Day gives a slightly different version of events (pp 92-93) claiming that the demonstration was organised with his permission rather than his instigation, but the Young version seems more plausible.

[206] Hinchcliffe (2013) in Hinchcliffe et al (eds) (2013). p172, citing Robin Young's diaries.

> Another adverse factor in the situation was the activities of some British Intelligence Officers. These activities were often "mad". Two names he mentioned were Nash and Young. British intelligence officers seemed to think that they could do things in Aden without it being known. But in a place like Aden where everyone knew everyone else they could not. There were reports of British Intelligence officers arranging bomb explosions in order to stir up feeling against the NLF. He hoped that these reports were not true, but in some particular cases he was certain they were true. When things like this became known it had a tremendous effect on people's attitude towards the British administration.[207]

A similar story is told by Sultan Ghalib al Quaiti who insists that his people had observed British soldiers in the Agency in Mukalla sneaking out at night and planting bombs.[208]

At some point Trevaskis was even suggesting extrajudicial killings. His suggestion that in retaliation against the NLF murder campaign there should be a covert assassination campaign against known terrorists shocked even MI5. According to Andrew, quoting MI5 archive material:

> At a meeting at the Colonial Office, Director E [the MI5 branch dealing with the colonies], Bill Magan argued that as "in the Malayan jungle" and "against mau mau in the Kenyan forests", the correct strategy in Aden was not to kill terrorists but to capture and interrogate them. When asked by the Colonial office to clarify his proposals for targeting terrorists, Trevaskis dropped the subject.[209]

In the period 1957-63 there seems to have been little effort on the part of Governors Johnston and Luce to challenge any of Trevaskis' objectives and tactics. Indeed relations between Luce and Trevaskis seem to have been nothing but perfectly harmonious. Trevaskis

[207] Maitland to Weir, 15 January 1965, CO1055/80.

[208] Interview with Sultan Ghalib al Quaiti, London October 2012.

[209] Andrew (2009), p475. Andrew says that 'Magan believed that the original proposal had come from the armed services and the MOD, which had pressed it on the high commission.' However he then adds, 'The SLO in Aden reported that he too was inclined to favour the selective targeting of known terrorists. Magan did not. "For myself", he replied, "I think that experience shows that to counter terrorism with terrorism is for the authority administering the law a two edged and dangerous weapon and the temptation to use it is best avoided". The SLO continued to argue his case, "I am not advising anything drastic: all I would suggest at present is that [Trevaskis] be advised to inform head of special branch that if a very few NLF suspects were shot whilst resisting arrest there should be nothing more than an informal inquest." Magan noted his (probably exasperated) dissent on the SLO letter.

wrote to Luce when he was about to leave the Governorship of Aden, profusely thanking and praising him, ending the letter:

> Finally, I must thank you personally for all the unfailing kindness and help I have had. Few subordinate officers could have been given such a large measure of freedom and yet have had the continual comfort of such wise and sympathetic guidance.[210]

Luce replied in equally complimentary terms on 31st July 1960:

> We have certainly had an eventful and stirring four years together and it has been a tremendous advantage for me that I've felt completely confident in your judgement and ability to handle the many difficulties and WAP problems. It is very nice to know that our esteem has been mutual.[211]

This raises the question of why Luce went along with Trevaskis plans so fully. An obvious reason is that Luce had his hands full with events in Aden, and the perception that Trevaskis had pacified the WAP would have been a welcome development. Luce was not averse to 'nipping trouble in the bud' himself, as his record whilst Resident in the Gulf shows. Trevaskis was persuasive, and as we have seen not averse to massaging the truth when it suited him. The Governor, not to mention the Colonial Office, had very few alternative sources of information apart from what the WAP Agency was providing.

Luce would also have been aware of Trevaskis' close connections with important people in London, including with Julian Amery, who was Luce's immediate boss as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office (from 28 November 1958 to 28 October 1960). It is somewhat strange that in his handwritten note, Luce goes out of his way to flaunt his "hardline" credentials, explaining at length to Trevaskis that he had stayed on as Governor for a further two months on condition that he would be allowed to see through the tough labour laws that were meant to rein in ATUC, a favourite theme of both Trevaskis and

[210] Letter from Trevaskis to Luce, 14 July 1960; TREV I/5/7.
[211] Letter from Luce to Trevaskis, 31 July 1960, TREV I/5/7.

Amery. Indeed Luce's attitude became much harder towards the end of 1958, coinciding with Amery's appointment.

If Trevaskis could get away with swaying the experienced Luce to his arguments, he definitely had no problems in managing his successor, Charles Johnston, whose arm's-length approach to the situation in the WAP, allowed even more leeway to "the man on the spot".[212] However, Johnston understood he had a problem, and at least on one occasion confronted Trevaskis. Writing to the PUS at the Colonial Office, Johnston said he was 'disturbed by a growing tendency on his [Trevaskis'] part to behave as if he was absolutely indispensable and accountable for his actions neither to me nor to anyone else.'[213] Johnston added 'He has been under considerable strain for some time. The truth is that he has been in his present job too long for his own good; he is beginning to suffer to the emotionalism and subjectiveness to which even the ablest of us are prone in such a situation.'[214] Johnston complained of 'a hint of discourtesy', which he thought if maintained could be harmful to his authority.[215] The matter had come to a head when both were guests of the Audhali Sultan. A discussion on the virtues of Oxford, (of which Johnston was an alumni), and Cambridge, (Trevaskis' alma mater), apparently got out of hand, and Trevaskis accused Johnston of being a traitor for not going to Cambridge. Shortly after Johnston confronted Trevaskis on the incident, and came close to accusing him of abusing his informality and friendship. Trevaskis apparently took it badly and said he will ask for a transfer. The following day he left for London to attend to his dying father. Johnston, who was well aware that Trevaskis was politically well connected, and anticipating problems, wrote a long letter to the Colonial Office explaining the situation.

[212] Johnston (1963), p213, describes Trevaskis as 'the man from the field with unrivalled special knowledge of a particular area', adding that 'behind a pro-consular exterior Trevaskis had a razor-sharp intelligence and an imagination that could apply itself equally to the immediate subtleties of the negotiation and to the long-term problems of the future. The confidence which the Federal Ministers placed in him was of great value to me throughout my whole tour of duty. His intimate knowledge of the Western Protectorate prepared me for my tours there and is reflected in these pages.'

[213] Johnston to Poynton, 24 October 1961, (Johnston 2/25).

[214] Ibid.

[215] ibid.

But a few days later, Trevaskis, replying to a conciliatory note that Johnston had sent him in which he asked him to put the incident behind him[216], was back in form talking about the next steps in dealing with the constitutional developments, as if nothing had happened.[217] This incident was clearly not an argument about Oxford and Cambridge, and shows the awkward situation that Johnston was in. As he tells Poynton, 'he is not an easy subordinate, but in my view his qualities make it worthwhile putting up with this disadvantage. I should hope to be able to keep him here for the time being, and I continue to regard him as suitable for a Governorship in due course.'[218] The correspondence makes it clear that what Johnston had in mind was for Trevaskis to stay until the Constitutional talks finished, and then be promoted to Governor and moved to some other Colony. It must therefore have been quite a surprise for Johnston to learn that Trevaskis had actually been appointed as his successor.

Trevaskis only served as High Commissioner for a short time (from 17 July 1963 to 21 December 1964), and in this period survived an assassination attempt, when somebody threw a grenade at him, as he was about to embark on a plane to London. Trevaskis was generally disliked in Aden by all sections of Arab society. The middle class Adenis blamed him for ruining the colony by his efforts to integrate it into the ill-fated Federation; nationalists considered him a hardline imperialist who was hostile to their cause; and the left-wingers considered him an agent of the forces of reaction embodied by "his Sultans". He tried to manage the situation in Aden in the same way that he had managed it in the WAP, even if it was already clear that even there it had not really worked. He sought and received money to conduct a series of what he called anti-subversion operations that involved:

> penetration of hostile organisations (including telephone tapping etc.); subversion of key figures; promoting dissension and rivalries and encouraging splinter groups; breaking up of meetings (including use of agents provocateurs.[219]

[216] Johnston to Trevaskis, 23 October 1961 Johnston 2/25.
[217] Trevaskis to Johnston, 27 October 1961; Johnston 2/25.
[218] Johnston to Poynton, 24 October 1961; Johnston 2/25.
[219] TREV I/6.

Trevaskis was continuously inclined to see things in black and white. However, in Aden, there were now people who were ready to question his judgement. In his book *Aden Insurgency*, Jonathan Walker, gives a detailed account of "Operation Nutcracker", and wider counter insurgency measures at the time when Trevaskis was High Commissioner. Mentioned is Trevaskis' insistence on retaliatory measures against Yemeni territory for incidents that the military were not certain could be interpreted as outright hostility. John Bushell, the Political Adviser to Middle East Command was worried about the way Trevaskis interpreted intelligence reports, and had confided in Frank Branchley at the Arabian Department of the Foreign Office:

> I am afraid it will always be difficult as long as Trevaskis is High Commissioner, if only because he has such a forceful personality. His staff do not care to argue with him and since, as you know, he is convinced that the Egyptians have a great plot against the Federation, he naturally tends to interpret any incident of this sort according to his theory.[220]

Walker cited a number of other disagreements between Trevaskis and the military. It seems that at this point the military commanders were becoming increasingly aware of some of the issues arising out of Trevaskis' particular reading of the situation, and the solutions needed to deal with it.[221]

The matter was resolved after persistent insistence by Trevaskis, who once more gave the impression that he was voicing the feelings of the Sultans,[222] with the bombing of a fort in Marib, across the border in Yemen. However at this point Trevaskis must have started understanding that his tactics were not working and were being seriously questioned. In his

[220] Bushell to Bremchley, 19 March 1964 FO 371/1/174627 quoted in Walker (2004), p87.
[221] Walker (2004), ch4.
[222] See for example Trevaskis to Secretary of State and others 20 March 1964, 21 March 1964 and 22 March 1964. The telegram of 21 March said simply, 'have warned HMG of the ultimate consequences of any failure on their part to defend the Federation effectively. I can do no more'. DSND 8/7

first diary note for 1964 Trevaskis writes: 'The new year came in at a moment of great tension here and seldom have I felt so isolated and despondent'.[223]

Trevaskis seems to have been respected, even if not universally liked, by his team in the WAP, who referred to him as Uncle Ken. Some, such as Robin Young 'who had enormous admiration for Uncle Ken willingly absorbed Trevaskis' prejudices and suspicions…',[224] and the Trevaskis factor remained in Aden long after he himself was gone.

Trevaskis' long epistles, including his monthly letters to his staff in the field in the WAP and his letters to colleagues in Britain such as Amery and Professor Serjeant, were worthy of an Oxbridge don and show a knowledge, even if not necessarily an understanding, of the region he was responsible for. He often comes across as a man torn between loyalty to an empire that was crumbling day by day, and a need to explain his work as not being that of an alien occupier but of a benevolent shepherd, overseeing his flock and keeping it out of mischief and harm. This belief made Trevaskis messianic in his approach to the tasks he faced in Aden. In achieving this messianic objective he could justify his actions including bending rules and cutting corners.

He was 'retired'[225] unceremoniously and against his wishes by the Labour government in December 1964. On his return to Britain he established contact with his old school friend Julian Amery, with whom he had been in correspondence throughout his Colonial service career. Amery, who credits Trevaskis with saving him from bullying when he first arrived as a pupil at Summer Fields, continued to hold Trevaskis in high regard, and in his autobiography describes him as 'an outstandingly successful High Commissioner'.[226] Amery put him in touch with Duncan Sandys, the last Conservative Colonial Secretary, who

[223] Diary note headed, 1-19 January [1964]; Trevaskis says above the note that due to his damaged hand the note was written 'in retrospect'. TREV II/2/8.

[224] Hinchcliffe et al (eds); (2013), p157.

[225] This is the phrase that Trevaskis uses when writing to Julian Amery on 29 December 1964: 'You would have heard by now that I have been retired'; AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 1.

[226] Amery (1973), p37.

had been Trevaskis' boss until a few weeks before. Trevaskis became an informal adviser for both Amery and Sandys, using the contacts he still had amongst his old team in Government House in Aden, enabling both Conservative politicians to keep pressure on the Labour Government on the issue of Aden. (This is discussed further in Chapter 5).

Yet Trevaskis' career was in shambles. He had not lived in Britain since before WWII. He asked Amery for advice 'on how to get a congenial job in this country?'[227] Amery tried unsuccessfully to lobby for him to get a job with some of the arms industries with whom he had made friends when he was Minister, such as BAC and Hawker Sidley, but to no avail.[228] Trevaskis set up a consultancy company which failed.[229] On 25 April 1967, he wrote to Duncan Sandys:

> It was very kind of you to offer to help over my personal affairs. I am afraid that I suffered a major setback in my business venture and I certainly would be grateful for any suggestions for the future. I am afraid that persons like myself are not much in demand in so far as full time permanent jobs are concerned. We are difficult to fit into organisations at the appropriate level and are of course handicapped by not knowing enough about the technicalities of their business. As far as I can judge – taking the case of Luce as an example – our best role is that of a part time director where we can offer specialist advice on places like the Middle East. Admittedly one cannot expect to be very handsomely paid in such a capacity, but as against that, in my case, I would be spared the cost of maintaining an additional establishment in London.[230]

Sandys replied three days later, 'if I hear of any opening for you in business I will let you know. Meanwhile if there is anybody to whom I could usefully sing your praises, do not hesitate to ask me'.[231] Both Trevaskis letters to Sandys and the latter's reply also dealt with the situation in South Arabia, and show the extent Trevaskis had become an important source of information for Sandys, in his attempt to keep pressure on the Labour government on Aden.

[227] Trevaskis to Amery, 29 December 1964; AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 1.

[228] Trevaskis to Amery, AMEJ 1/7/7/ pt 2, 11 July 1965; Amery to Viscount Caldecote, AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 1 5 January 1965.

[229] Sir Kennedy Trevaskis and Partners Ltd (Management and Industrial Consultants).

[230] Trevaskis to Sandys, 25 April 1967; DSND 14/1.

[231] Sandys to Trevaskis, 28 April 1967 DSND 14/1.

In 1969, Trevaskis visited Qatar with letters from Amery to the Deputy Ruler. Simon C. Smith says that he was there 'ostensibly on business but in fact using his visit to gather information for the Conservatives'.[232] He was also in Muscat and Salalah in 1970.[233] By this time however Sandys and Amery had already been sidelined, and like them Trevaskis was seen as yesterday's man. Disillusioned, Trevaskis separated from his wife, Bunty, who had been with him in all the challenging years in South Arabia, and co-habited with Valentine Sylvia Donovan, a widow twenty years his junior[234]. He focused more on his business ventures, and 'after some adventures formed a partnership with Muhammed Farid [the former Federation Foreign Minister] and a Canadian Oil Company [Sunningdale Oils]' and was 'rumoured to be a millionaire',[235] although when he died in 1990, aged 75, his estate was reported to be £400 overdraft.[236]

When Trevaskis died, Valentine, who had by now taken his surname by deed, asked Amery to write the forward to a book of memoirs that Trevaskis had apparently written[237]. It seems the book was in early draft and she had also given it to Mohammed (presumably Mohammed Farid) to correct[238]. Amery did write a forward, dated 13 August 1991, which is available in his archive, but the book was never published, and the manuscript is not available. Amery suggests that Trevaskis never had time to revise his memoirs, adding 'In a sense they are the better off for that. They have the freshness of a diary and are studded with

[232] Smith (2013), pp 33-34. This seems to be the impression that Trevaskis was giving to people in the region, although there is nothing to indicate that his connections with the Conservatives went beyond Amery and Sandys.

[233] Amery wrote to Sultan Said on 10 July 1970 saying 'I am glad of Your Highness friendship with him.', AMEJ/1/7/15.

[234] D'Avray (2008).

[235] Ledger (1983), p225.

[236] D'Avray (2008) says that in the 1980s Trevaskis also became 'a valued adviser of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front'.

[237] AMEJ 2/1/157, Letter of Valentine Trevaskis to Amery, 30 June 1991.

[238] Ibid.

rough judgements on his superiors and colleagues which he might well have found appropriate to modify'.[239]

2.5 William Luce and the virtue of flexibility

William Luce was a likeable, more pragmatic operator, a follower of the long-standing and well-tested Foreign Office practice of sticking closely to your enemy, with an eye on the 'big picture'. Throughout his career, Luce seemed to have been more aware of Britain's changing circumstances, and the limits of imperial power, and sought to work within them, unlike Trevaskis who was constantly asking for more resources, resources that simply were no longer available in Britain's reduced circumstances post-WWII.

A former British Ambassador to Iran, Sir Anthony Parsons says Luce's rubric should have been 'Firmness tempered with sympathy and humour'. He adds,

> I have met Arabs who never knew him who regarded him as an old fashioned imperialist. His appearance and background could give this absurdly false impression. He had a remarkable gift of persuading other people to adopt his point of view without their feeling either that they had been coerced or humiliated. This was where the light heartedness came in. I can recall staff meetings in the Residency in Bahrain punctuated by roars of laughter, but I do not remember feeling that his ultimate decisions were wrong or had been taken without everyone having had a chance to put his or her view. I remember accompanying him to call on Arab dignitaries whom he wished to persuade either to change course on which they were set or to embark on one which they were reluctant to follow. Again the meetings generally ended with high good humour and agreement with his arguments. This ability – to get his way without giving offence or leaving an aftertaste of resentment – was nowhere more skilfully deployed than in the year of negotiations which ended in December 1971. Luce had to deal with the vain and arrogant Pahlavi government in Iran, with suspicious Saudis and anxious Gulf rulers, not to mention his political bosses in London, some of whom were far from committed to the decision to terminate the British protective presence in the Gulf. He charmed everybody, he persuaded everybody, he was patient, good humoured (with occasional explosions) and skilful. The overall conjuncture was favourable and Britain's last act closed with less trouble and more residual goodwill than was the case with any of the other episodes in the Middle East retreat.[240]

[239] AMEJ 2/1/157, Forward to an unpublished book.
[240] Anthony Parsons, Foreword to Balfour Paul (1994) page xviii.

This laudatory description is typical of others used by many Foreign Office colleagues to describe Luce. He was the quintessential British diplomat, and looked the part. However others cannot be blamed for seeing Luce in a completely different light. Luce held in his hands the ultimate decision on who ruled and who did not in territories "under his protection". The deposition of the Sultans of Lahej and Lower Yafa, the Rulers of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi and his contemplation of deposing the rulers of Ras al Khaimah and Ajman constituted not only a breach of faith but also probably an illegal act under international law. His manipulation of anything that stood in his way was no less ruthless than that of Trevaskis, even if executed more finely. Yet he left the region in 1966 in full glory, with the bands of the Trucial Oman Scouts playing the *Barren Rocks of Aden* on the parade ground of Sharjah.[241]

Within weeks of his retirement from the Foreign Service, William Luce was closely advising the Conservatives on British policy in the Gulf. He spoke to a joint meeting of the Conservative Party's Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees on 24 January 1967, in the House of Commons as the Committees were preparing a report on the situation in the Gulf.

Luce's ideas were consistent with those he advocated when he was Resident, saying that 'the aims of British policy in the Persian Gulf and Arabia were to keep out communism, to preserve British interests, in particular the flow of oil on reasonable terms, to keep the Shah of Iran pro-Western, and to preserve the east-about air route to the Far East.'[242] Released from the shackles of office, Luce was however even more adamant when revisiting some of his favourite themes, saying:

> The Persian Gulf was an inherently unstable area which had hitherto been preserved from chaos by the British presence. An early British withdrawal from the Gulf would be interpreted by the Shah as a surrender to President Nasser. If Britain

[241] Program of the Parade, LUCE G4.
[242] CPA CRD3/10/31.

withdrew in present conditions there would almost certainly be a period of disorder during which the flow of oil would be disrupted. The oil fields might fall into hostile hands. The local interests of British and Western oil companies might be nationalised and oil might only be obtainable on less favourable terms. He considered that the British stake in the area was too high to be put at risk by a premature withdrawal. It was naïve to suppose that the Arabs would be bound to sell their oil to the west whatever happened. Calculations of economic self-interest did not always prevail in the Middle East over purely political ambitions.[243]

The minutes of the meeting add:

> Sir William recalled that the Defence Review had confirmed the need for Britain to remain in the Gulf for the time being. In the light of this judgement Sir William considered that the government's decision to withdraw from Aden in 1968 was illogical. He believed that if this decision had not been announced Nasser would by now have abandoned his commitment in Yemen; now of course he was determined to hang on so that he could influence what happened in South Arabia after the British left.[244] A pro-Nasser regime in South Arabia would be very damaging to western interests. It would be a severe blow to Saudi Arabia and would give the Egyptians a springboard from which to extend their influence up the coast through Oman and Muscat into the Gulf.

The minutes continue:

> Sir William said that Britain could not be expected to remain indefinitely in the Gulf. He saw no hope of building up a viable entity from among the Gulf States themselves. Nor could the Arab League provide the answer. He thought it essential that there should be a tacit understanding between King Feisal [of Saudi Arabia] and the Shah of Iran. He favoured a system of "Arab Peninsula Solidarity". In such a system the Gulf States would preserve their internal autonomy but would be protected by Saudi Arabia and guided by her in Foreign Affairs. On the outer edge of this system would be Kuwait, preserving her present independent position in the Arab world, but friendly and co-operative with her Gulf neighbours. The Arabs preferred informal arrangements of this kind to formal federation and pooling of sovereignty. King Feisal already had a high reputation among the Gulf rulers, though they were wary of traditional Saudi ambitions. Some limited co-operation had already taken place between the Gulf States. The Buraimi problem was still unsolved but the ruler of Abu Dhabi wanted good relations with King Feisal.

In conclusion Luce set out to the Joint Committee meeting the principles that should guide British policy:

[243] Ibid.

[244] This view was queried by Edward Heath who asked Douglas Hurd to comment on it. Hurd replied "I know of no hard evidence that Nasser would have withdrawn from Yemen by now if Britain had said she would stay in the Gulf." Hurd argued that an Egyptian withdrawal would lead to a collapse of the Republican Regime in the Yemen which Nasser wanted to avoid. (Note of Douglas Hurd to Edward Heath 24 February 1967; CPA CRD3/10/31).

> (1) We should encourage the four main Gulf States to co-operate among themselves; (2) We should gradually shed the administrative functions which we still perform in the Gulf; (3) We should seek to contain subversion in the Gulf by encouraging the rulers to reform; (4) So long as Nasser remains in the Yemen we should give the fullest possible military support to South Arabia. If the Labour Government remain firmly determined to leave South Arabia without a British military guarantee it was unrealistic to suppose that Saudi Arabia would protect the new state militarily. In these circumstances a United Nations presence, developed out of the United Nations Mission already projected, might be better than nothing.'[245]

At roughly the same time he addressed the Conservative Commonwealth and Overseas Council (CCOC), in a similar fashion as part of their preparation of a report on Aden and the Gulf. Luce helped to inform both papers and his positions were soon on their way to becoming official Conservative Party policy. In a note to party leader Edward Heath, Douglas Hurd, then at the Conservative Research Office, said of the CCOC paper:[246]

> The general thesis of the paper is based on the ideas of Sir W Luce, until recently British resident in Bahrain. Sir W Luce has prepared his ideas with care and they could I think, be the foundation of future Conservative policy for the area. Briefly he believes that Britain should not stay in the Gulf indefinitely, but should remain until, with her help the Gulf States and South Arabia have placed themselves under the protection of Saudi Arabia.[247]

From all the above it is possible to conclude that Luce at this stage: (a) Did not think that a Federation of Arab Emirates was possible; (b) That he saw Saudi Arabia replacing Britain as a protecting power in the region; (c) That he saw the future of the nine Gulf States as not being independent, together or separately, but as being part of some sort of Saudi super state where they would only have internal autonomy; (d) That he felt that an "early" British military withdrawal would bring about all kinds of dire consequences. With hindsight we can say that Luce was wrong on these and a number of other assumptions in his paper. Luce's strength however, was primarily in his flexibility and adaptability. He was not religiously tied to his ideas and was happy to change them as he went along. This made Luce a much more

[245] Hurd to Heath, 24 February 1967. CPA CRD3/10/31
[246] "The Persian Gulf in British Policy", CCOC Paper 240 March 1967 CPA CRD3/10/31
[247] ibid.

pragmatic operator than Trevaskis ever was. For him, what was important was the achievement of the ultimate objectives.

There is some evidence to suggest that Luce was not comfortable in dealing with the media. The publication of a book, that projected his work in the Gulf in a critical manner,[248] provoked a sharp exchange with the author.[249] Shortly before the independence of the UAE, Luce also had a showdown with the Editor of the al-Khaleej newspaper, Abdullah Omran Taryam. He had Taryam summoned by an officer of the TOS in the presence of the Ruler of Sharjah and told him that his articles were very unhelpful and were irritating the Iranians, and suggested that if there were complications in the negotiations it would all be his fault.[250] This indicates that whilst Luce was an able diplomat, he was very much of the old school, and expected deference.

On his return to London in 1966, Luce was given directorship of a number of banks and companies, and continued to travel to the region in royal style, with both the British representatives and the local dignitaries treating him as if he was still the Resident.[251] He built a relationship with the Conservative Party but one which was rather detached, and rather than being used by Conservative politicians to influence the Foreign Office and government policy, he remained in tune with Foreign Office policy, and there is some evidence that he was used by the Foreign Office to influence Conservative politicians and Conservative policy, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. On the return of the Conservative Party to government in 1970, he was appointed as Special Representative of the Government to the Gulf, and between 1970 and 1972, he oversaw the final chapter of the British exit from the Gulf, before returning to his City Directorships. He died in 1977, aged 70.

[248] "Power Play", by Leonard Mosley (1973).
[249] LUCE G8.
[250] From conversation with Abdullah Omran Taryam in Sharjah December 2011.
[251] Such trips took place in April/May 1968 and March/April 1969.

2.6 A failure and a success.

The policy of Trevaskis to pursue a federation in South Arabia at all costs ended in failure, although ironically a unitary state emerged subsequently. In a review of *Shades of Amber* published in *The Observer* on 17 March 1968, Patrick Seale, generously describes Trevaskis as the 'earnest, honest but essentially puzzled architect of the ill-fated South Arabian Federation'. Seale however adds that British officials in South Arabia proved inadequate on three grounds:

> First, in their deep and unwise involvement with the tribes of the Aden hinterland; secondly in their almost total failure to recognise and come to terms with modern style nationalism as it emerged – from the modest expression of the South Arabia League, to the next stage of trade union backed but still essentially peaceable ferment as represented by Abdalla al-Asnag's People's Socialist Party, and finally to the most extreme manifestation of all, the National Liberation Front, whose leader, Qahtan al-Shaabi is now president of an independent South Arabia; thirdly in coping with the terrorism of the past four years, itself a symptom of frustrated nationalism and not only of foreign intervention.[252]

Trevaskis' biggest mistake was to read the situation in South Arabia and the Middle East in black and white terms, and to categorise everybody in terms of 'friends' and 'enemies'. In fact few of those thus branded had the luxury to make such categorical choices.

One of the political officers in WAP from 1959 onwards was Godfrey Meynell. Writing much later he made a perceptive comment: '… people lived in several mental compartments. In some houses you would see the Queen's portrait and Abdel Nasser's in the same room.'[253] It is not clear if Meynell noticed this at the time, or reflected on it later. Certainly the senior people who led the British presence in South Arabia and the Gulf seem not to have noticed this, and preferred to look at things as black and white, our "enemies" and our "friends". Yet most people, including some of those discussed in this chapter and the next were not so easily pigeonholed. Nearly all of those in South Arabia were young and

[252] Patrick Seale, "Puzzled Arabian Knights", *The Observer*, London, 17 March 1968
[253] Hinchcliffe et al. (eds) (2013), p90-91.

impressionable. There was, as Meynell also remarked, 'much confused goodwill for Britain', which the Colonial administrators failed to galvanise. Instead, worried about the spread of nationalism they moved in aggressively to neutralise people who, as it turned out, were by far the most moderate of those challenging British rule. This love-hate relationship was of course not unique to the area and could be found in other parts of the empire where it eventually was used as the basis for the new relationship between the ex-colonies and the metropole, but where, perhaps, expectation of what the post-imperial relationship would look like was much more modest. Ironically, it was Charles Johnston's comparison of Africans as a 'Neapolitan ice', in his Aden valedictory, that came closest to recognising the complexity of the issue, even though he seemed not to have understood its significance, and his statement would in today's politically correct atmosphere be considered as racist. The Arabs themselves admit the contradiction. British rule was oppressive, but it sometimes brought material advantages and a chance to emerge from abject poverty. As one of the early nationalist leaders put it, 'British rule was like a bee – it had a sting, but it also produced honey.'[254]

William Luce's more pragmatic approach in the Gulf, under tighter supervision of the Foreign Office, resulted in the creation of a successful United Arab Emirates, even if the ultimate objective of having a Federation of the Nine – including Bahrain and Qatar, failed. While rulers were considered expendable if they were not compliant, the process of replacing rulers was more cautiously considered. It took a long time for the British to make up their mind with regards to replacing Sheikh Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi, and only proceeded once Shakhbut's own intransigence had finally frustrated his own family enough for them to pluck the courage to acquiesce to British pressure. In the end, the UAE succeeded not because the British pushed for it, although they did, but because the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai finally understood that they ran high risks if they didn't form one state, and provided each

[254] Interview with Abdu Hamza, Aden 2012.

other with enough mutual guarantees to ensure the minimum level of trust required. The British were actually taken by surprise when this happened, and were not part of the crucial final stages of the negotiations between Dubai and Abu Dhabi.[255] Once Abu Dhabi and Dubai had agreed, the others had no alternative but to follow suit. Sheikh Zayed's shrewdness and generosity ensured that once in the process, they were happy to stay.[256]

[255] Bahrain Residency to FCO, 24 November 1971, LUCE G29. Geoffrey Arthur reported to the Foreign Office about a meeting he had that morning with Sheikh Zayed in which he had expressed surprise about how the discussions with Dubai were playing out.

[256] One of the members of the Ajman delegation negotiating the federation, Joudat al Barghouti told the author in an interview on 29 March 2012 that the personality and generosity of Sheikh Zayed was a key factor in the formation of the UAE. 'He gave with both hands', he said.

Chapter 3. Local elites and managed change: the politics of the ruling families in the Gulf and South Arabia, and instruments of British manipulation

In his 1966 report, Peter Tripp, quoted a 1939 despatch by the Political Resident in the Gulf, which he says contained ideas that 'were still largely applicable in 1950, and which are not yet wholly out of date'. The 1939 despatch quoted by Tripp stated:

> "Our rule over the Arab states of the Gulf rests on the goodwill of the rulers and their people. This goodwill depends on three factors. First – the fact that as far as possible we let the rulers and their people, under our guidance and advice, manage their affairs in their own way. Second – the fact that in our various negotiations with the rulers in which of course their people are interested, on the subject of oil, air facilities and so forth, we give them a patient hearing and a square deal. Third – and most important, the Rulers and their peoples realise that it was only His Majesty's government who protect them from absorption by their stronger neighbours."

Tripp adds,

> This basis of an historic relationship became progressively more difficult to maintain in the changing circumstances of the 1950s when strategic, political and economic factors began to threaten the isolation of hitherto mainly self-contained and largely self-sufficient sheikhdoms with primitive economies. But despite these changes our intricate ritual dance with the rulers continued to be enacted – against a changing background. Not only was the world shrinking with the swift development of modern communications, but the economic and social life of some of the sheikhdoms was changing rapidly with the exploitation of oil and the consequent influx of foreigners.[257]

Yet despite the fact that the relationship was nothing but anachronistic, the 'intricate ritual dance' was ongoing, and indeed seemed to have no end.

[257] Tripp, op.cit; LUCE G5.

3.1 From advice to deposition: ten instruments of British manipulation or coercion.

British rule in Arabia hinged on its relations with the ruling families, and in most cases Rulers' powers hinged on British support. Britain influenced the ruling families through a mix of hard and soft power, ranging from benign advice down to the ultimate sanction, the removal of the Ruler. The raft of measures can be summarised as follows.

(a) Advice.

The term was used by British officialdom with the widest possible elasticity, and its scope was different according to the kind of treaties that the Ruler (or his predecessors) had signed. As a minimum, advice covered in all cases issues related to foreign relations – often loosely interpreted as all relations with all external actors – together with some other issues on which Britain retained reserved powers. Over time, other topics related to governance and the "rule of law" were added, and the British allowed themselves maximum elasticity in interpreting the term to suit their interests. The advice was often benign, with British officials trying their best to assist the rulers in a positive way. Often this advice was welcomed, and there are many examples of life-long friendships between British personnel and local ruling family members to prove this. Thus most of the time British objectives could be achieved through this method, but the ambiguity of the term and its flexible interpretation also became the basis of many of the disputes that ensued.

(b) Embedding British officials in the Rulers administration and Court.

In 1925 Charles Belgrave, was recruited as a member of staff of the Ruler of Bahrain. By the early 1960s the practice of embedding British officials in the rulers' administrations and courts became an increasingly popular and cost effective way of influencing decisions, and keeping an eye on affairs. It had the added advantage of not being a burden on the exchequer, since the ruler was expected to pay for the salary and cost of the official

concerned. At first it was simply a Secretary – who de facto became the head of the local administration, as happened in Bahrain before WWII; often it was a financial adviser, and in some cases, such as in Muscat, a military adviser. These senior positions were invariably filled by British persons, often recruited through the Foreign Office, and anything different was looked at with suspicion and disapproval. A few rulers managed to get away with hiring advisers from other Arab countries, for example Qatar had an able Egyptian Legal Adviser, Dr Hassan Kamel, and in tiny Ajman, where a British adviser could not be afforded, a Palestinian school teacher, Joudat al Barghouti, was asked to double-up as Secretary to the Government, but in general, key positions were filled by British persons, whilst junior positions in the administration and the military were often filled by Sudanese and Jordanians. The richer the Ruler the more he was encouraged to use such personnel, not always with efficient results. Some rulers played along with this, whilst others, like Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi, procrastinated, and to the very few who were engaged he was always considered an impossible employer. Some of these advisers took their brief literally, and went native to the point that they stopped being trusted by the British officials[258], but most understood that their job was to serve the local Ruler, whilst remaining loyal, and subservient to the British Crown. This network enabled the British administrators to exert influence on the local governments from within, and further boxed in the Rulers, although after 1964, some of these networks, having little affinity with a Labour government in London, developed a life of their own and started playing a somewhat more shadowy role, as will be discussed subsequently.

(c) Monetary and material incentives.

This was never a very popular way of influencing policy or managing situations, simply because there was never much money to go around. It was hardly used in the Gulf at

[258] According to Beasant (2002), pp121-2, several British officials who were in the employ of Sultan Said of Oman were dismissed after the 1970 coup. He says 'being of the highest possible integrity they had remained loyal to him'. Ledger (1983) p223, criticises British officers who 'often forgot whom they were supposed to be serving, the interest of Britain or even the Federal Government, and instead advanced the often conflicting interests of their princelings or their organisations.'

all, and even when British generosity became necessary to fight off other possible suitors, the amounts were very modest. In South Arabia, Trevaskis for a short time managed to secure reasonable funding for the Federation, a lot of which ended in the personal purses of the sultans, however, by and large British support for the rulers there had traditionally been, and remained until the mid-1960s, guns and ammunition, which the recipients often immediately re-sold at market prices. Trevaskis in a comment on this practice says that 'The key to power in the tribal areas is strength measured in terms of rifles and ammunition which both enable a community to arm itself and in time of need to purchase allies.'[259]

(d) Education of the younger members of the ruling families.

The British saw this as an important tool for the long term, and deployed it intensively in the 1960s with mixed results. There were two considerations at play here: the British were keen to have educated future rulers, but were even keener that they should not be educated in places like Cairo and Beirut where they were afraid they may pick up the wrong ideas. Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim and others in South Arabia had been educated in Egypt, even before the Nasserist revolution, and the British found the result disquieting, and were determined not to repeat the same mistake. Oman's Qaboos, aged 18, was sent to Felsham House near Bury St Edmunds, to be crammed under a staunchly conservative colonial schoolmaster, Philip Romans.[260] Shortly after the British arranged for Sheikh Sultan bin Shakhbut to go to Felsham House, but the arrangement did not work out well at all and he eventually dropped out.[261] Sultan objected to restrictions that appeared 'to be the result of foreign office instructions'. [262] Sultan was at this time 26 years old, and Felsham House was geared for much younger students. In 1962, Khalid bin Saqr was sent to Loughborough College to study for his O-levels.

[259] TREV I/4/3; WAP Report p62.
[260] Takriti, p170.
[261] Brown to Walmsley, Rof E 1962, p21.
[262] Leinhardt to Walmesley, 12 June 1962; RofE, 1962; p30.

By the early 1960s the strategy changed somewhat and the preference was to send the sons of rulers and other senior members of the ruling families to the Mons and Sandhurst military academies.

Attempts to educate the sons of the Sheikhs and Sultans in Britain often did not find favour with their fathers. One reason was that, in a culture whereby sons were often demanded as hostages for their parents' good behaviour – a practice that the British had engaged with also in South Arabia – the prospect that a son in Britain may be used as a means of putting pressure on his father would not have been considered a far-fetched idea, and some were naturally cautious.

(e) Playing on the ego of the Sheikhs with symbolic gestures, such as trips to London.

Trips to London and access to members of the Royal Family and of the Government were often used as recognition "for good performance". Of course the British authorities could not stop members of ruling families visiting London of their own accord, which they often did. Dubai's Al Makhtoum for example, seemed to have preferred to go to London in this way rather than through visits arranged with protocol, but others valued the attention, and the possibility, when it was offered, of tea with the Queen.[263] They saw this as recognition of their friendship with Britain, and by implication of their own security of tenure. Those in the good books were accorded high-level meetings and given special attention, and made aware of their significance. Sometimes, especially in the final stages, money became an issue, and hospitality, never lavish, became even stingier. The Sultan of Quaiti was installed in a dingy three star hotel near Victoria Station on one of his visits. He was comforted by being told that it was prestigious because it was close to Buckingham Palace.[264]

[263] Oliver Miles says that this was the high point of Sheikh Shakhbut's annual visit to London, (Interview for the Imperial War Museum recorded in 2001; Item 21597).

[264] Interview with Sultan Ghalib al Quaiti, October 2012.

This process went further because it also involved attending to Rulers and other members of the Ruling families when they visited third countries, a chore not always appreciated by diplomatic and consular posts who often had no idea who these people were, their importance or not, and how to deal with them. A visit by Shiekh Shakhbut to New York in 1961 exercised without end the imagination of the British Consulate-General there, whose staff were perplexed that Shakhbut spent most of his time in the US in his room watching television.[265] This practice was however a double-edged sword, because it also gave the British the chance to keep an eye on the members of the ruling families when they were overseas. The Embassy in Beirut, at the time the Arab capital of intrigue, was particularly efficient in this – most of its diplomats were also MECAS graduates and on first name terms with their counterparts in the Gulf and South Arabia. This proved particularly helpful when the case was being built up against the Ruler of Sharjah – his prolific lifestyle in Beirut had been amply reported by the Embassy[266] and reference to his 'degenerate' life was subsequently included in the family letter of deposition, no doubt drafted by the Political Agent.[267]

(f) Adjudication of territorial disputes.

By practice, rather than through any explicit agreement, the British had taken on the role of adjudicators in the disputes over land, boundaries and frontiers of their possessions in Arabia, and of these there were plenty. Whilst the matter often caused headaches for the Foreign Office lawyers, it gave British officials extremely important leverage over the rulers. British initiative could manifest itself in the outright creations of new entities from existing ones. Fujairah was thus created in 1952 from territory that, at least nominally, belonged to the Qawasim states of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. Several statelets were also carved out of

[265] New York to Arabian Department, 20 October 1961. RoE 1961, p43.
[266] Beirut (Craig) to Dubai (Balfour-Paul) 27 February 1965 RofE 1965, p 11.
[267] Bahrain to FO; 25 June 1965; RofE, 1965; p25-6.

existing ones in South Arabia in the course of implementing the "Forward Policy". Inevitably those who were the winners in these adjudications were grateful, and those who were losers resentful, which is the case with any ruling. However the question arises as to the extent to which decisions and rulings were made on the basis of political expediency, and British interest. Certainly this was a consideration taken into account, as was the case with the decision marking the Abu Dhabi-Qatar border in 1962. The timing of the British award on the dispute was itself determined by British commercial interests, since Shell wanted to establish an installation on the disputed Island of Halul. A detailed memorandum prepared by the Foreign Office Arabian Department dated 2 January 1962 discusses the issue in detail and outlines British interests, and how they could best be served, and proposes action on that basis.[268] This case is also interesting because it raised the issue of whether or not one or both states could go to international arbitration. One view in the Foreign Office said that they could not, even though they were allowed to have relations with each other. British arbitration was therefore a *sine qua non.* Intriguingly, an earlier exercise conducted by the British in 1933, when the territories were still under the supervision of the Raj, had concluded that some of the territories concerned actually belonged to neither Abu Dhabi nor Qatar, stating that 'considerable areas might be not in the possession of the Sheikhs, but (as appeared in the past to have been the case in the Arab littoral) of the Jawassim Arabs.'[269]

(g) Playing Family Politics

The ruling families in the Gulf and in South Arabia did not require any British encouragement to feud within themselves and between themselves. The practice through which rulers were chosen from amongst different family branches, which did not follow the rule of male *primogeniture* adopted in Europe, the principle that a ruler could be replaced for misrule and poverty created constant tensions and quarrels over resources. British officials

[268] RoQ 1966, pp328-344.
[269] RoQ, (1962), p355.

were able to manipulate family politics and turned it into an art. A son of a ruler who had gone out of favour might suddenly find himself being courted by the British Agent, to the disquiet of the ruler and his favourite sons. Shortly after the deposition of Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah the Agency in Dubai tried to play the two sons of the Ruler of Ajman against each other, reminding the Ruler's favourite of what happens to recalcitrant rulers,[270] thus suggesting that the British were ready to use the tool of deposition again if necessary. In these small tightly knit communities every small move assumed larger than life importance. On this occasion, a luncheon 'for the long neglected Sheikh Ali bin Rashid, eldest son of the Ruler of Ajman' by the British Agent, M.L. Tait, 'did not go unnoticed' and brought his brother hurriedly into the Agency pledging loyalty. Deposition was often not necessary. The threat of it through these nuanced actions was enough. Often relatives plotting against a Ruler would find a sympathetic ear at the Agency. For example in 1965, Sheikh Lt. Feisal al Qassemi, a member of the ruling family of Ras al Khaimah, approached his senior officer in the TOS with a view to remove the ruler of Ras al Khaimah. The officer immediately referred the query to the British Political Agent, who decided to keep Feisal as a reserve in case action was needed in Ras al Khaimah later[271].

(h) Use of force

This cruder way of influencing the decisions of the ruling families was popular in the Gulf in the 19th century - British Navy ships bombed Ras al Khaimah in 1809, 1816 and 1819, and Doha in 1833 and again in 1841- but became less so, or even unnecessary in the 20th. In South Arabia however it remained a tool of choice. By this time the airplane had replaced the gunboat. RAF bombings of villages whose rulers stepped out of line were a regular feature of British rule, even sometimes described as humane. Hickinbotham for

[270] FO371/179905 Agency Dubai to residency Bahrain, 7 September 1965, recording conversation with Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid of Ajman.

[271] Dubai to Bahrain 4 August 1965 RofE pp 34-38.

example says that as Governor he 'frequently had to authorise the use of air action against frontier raiders and recalcitrant tribesmen within protectorate limits', but did not recall 'at any time, any casualties as a result of such operations'.[272] A more realistic appraisal was made by the Cabinet in May 1964, when discussing possible air attacks, stating that 'In defining the targets of the proposed air attacks it would be necessary to take particular care to avoid if possible, killing or injuring women and children. On the other hand our troops should not be handicapped in their operations by the imposition of limitations on air action which might expose them to the risk of incurring unnecessary casualties.'[273] These aerial bombardments were often used prior to the deposition of a ruler as a warning, or in case deposition was not practical due to the remoteness of the territory in question, but by the mid-1960s they were widely used as part of counter-insurgency operations.

(i) Exile

It was not only rulers that had to be kept in line; sometimes they in fact needed to be protected from their own relatives, or particular members of a ruling family had to be kept out of the way because they posed a threat to British interests. In this situation, members of ruling families were often exiled, together with their immediate family. This exile could be for a short or long time, often depending on the whims of the local Political Agent, who, however, also had to take into account the mood of the ruler and the ruling family. In May 1955 for example, Sheikh Juma bin Makhtoum, brother of the then-Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Said and uncle of Sheikh Rashid who was Crown Prince and de facto regent, was exiled with his three sons. According to the Political Agent, J.P. Tripp, they had 'adopted an anti-British attitude and rallied pro-Saudi elements'; they had also 'intrigued against Sheikh Rashid criticising and obstructing his administration.' The Political Agent says that 'Sheikh Rashid conceived and executed the operation', but also speaks of the presence during the operation

[272] Hickinbotham (1958), p106.
[273] CAB/128/38 Minutes of Cabinet Meeting held on 14 May 1964.

of 'detachments from the Trucial Oman Levies which with Rashid's agreement had occupied positions on the outskirts of the town on both sides of the creek.'[274] After the operation, Sheikh Rashid wrote to the Political Agent thanking him for the support of the Trucial Oman Levies in the operation.

In a memorandum to the Foreign Secretary immediately afterwards, the Resident, B.A.A. Burrows says that Sheikh Rashid 'from being opposed to any action by the Levies in his territory he came to rely on their presence to back up his ultimatum to Juma. The effect of their presence will not be lost on the rest of the area'.[275] Burrows had for the operation authorised the deployment of two and half squadrons of Levies and two Navy ships from Bahrain, which in the event were not used.

(j) Deposition

The British, having signed treaties with the rulers, even if as Dresch says, 'few of them were rulers in an Indian or British sense', following traditions of the Raj 'accorded them different ranks and thus salutes of different numbers of cannon as if on a list of protocol around Delhi'.[276] In the WAP, the head of Abdali and Fadli tribes with a population of 15,000 and 20,000 respectively were accorded a nine-gun salute; Aqrabi, Hawshabi and Dali, with populations of 800, 6,000 and 12,000 respectively, were not accorded any salute at this stage.[277] The same procedure was applied on the Trucial Coast, where as late as 1952 when Fujeirah was recognised as a separate entity, its ruler, by decision of the Queen, was accorded a three-gun salute.[278] This ritual helped signify British recognition.

The ultimate British sanction was the "withdrawal of recognition", which in effect meant a *carte blanche* for another faction of the family to usurp power. Often the British gave the process a helping hand, although sometimes this was not even required. The process was

[274] Despatch No 10; 21 May 1955 from Agency Dubai to Residency Bahrain, RofE 1955, p499.
[275] Burrows to Macmillan; 31 May 1955, RofE 1955, pp 502-7
[276] Dresch (2000) p9.
[277] Ibid p10.
[278] FO to Bahrain 7 May 1952; RFofA, (United Arab Emirates), Vol 2, p617.

often dealt with at a local level, without much reference to the Bombay Government, or after 1947, to London. Things started to change after Whitehall took over control of the oversight of the territories, although not immediately. The Heads of a number of "states" in South Arabia were removed in the period 1947-57 with little reference to London. Things however changed after that to a large extent. The next section looks at the removal of six heads of ruling families between 1958-72; the similarities and difference in the British motivation and methods, often reflecting the different approach taken by the British personalities overseeing the process as well as changing circumstances in London and globally, and the consequences of these decisions. Another useful reason for looking at the six case studies is to understand the extent to which precedent helped justify future action, or at least make it more palatable. In 1964, whilst arguing with Foreign Office colleagues in favour of the expediency of the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi, and addressing a possible international outcry, William Luce reminded his Foreign Office colleagues, 'Were not these causes of excitement nine-day wonders? Who now heard of the former Sultan of Lahej?'[279]

3.2 The ultimate British tool - deposition

As the following six case studies show, the manipulation of the ruling families followed closely what were perceived to be British interests and objectives. In the first three cases, the rulers were removed because they were reformists and showed sympathy with Arab nationalism, even if their nationalism was of the most moderate kind and a less paranoiac and a more realistic approach could have allowed space for them. Through their actions, their loyalty to the British "project" had come into doubt, and following Trevaskis' line of "nipping trouble in the bud", and Luce's belief that nationalism could not be allowed to build a bridgehead in territory under British rule and protection, they had to go before they could

[279] FO 371/174702 Minute of Meeting held on July 14 1964.

do anything very serious. Their subsequent actions were declared treasonable, and then used to justify their deposition, even though it is highly unlikely that if still in power they would have gone that far.

The second set of three cases relates to rulers who were loyal to the British, and who probably detested nationalism (and communism) more than the British themselves, but who by the late 1960s failed to comprehend the new British priorities and were slow in adopting the British "modernisation" agenda. Thus, they had become a liability. Their case is more interesting, since the importance of the three states involved was much higher than the previous three. In the case of Qatar, the removal of the ruler took place after independence and after the country had joined the United Nations. British involvement was therefore even more discreet than in the other two, and may have amounted to tacit support rather than proactive action. The removal of the Sultan of Oman was also the subject of considerable packaging, since Oman too was ostensibly an independent country. In Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Shakhbut was deposed after a long period of consideration right at the top of the British establishment. The British had to wait until they got the acquiescence of the ruling family. In the end they had to conduct the deposition themselves, as indeed was pretty much the case also in Oman. In the second set of cases the new rulers who replaced those deposed were able to claim legitimacy, their task being helped by the fact that they were now the recipients of considerable oil revenues, which they could use to buy loyalty. In the first three cases no such resources existed. In all six cases British authority, on the ground, in London, and through British diplomatic missions abroad lied about the facts, gave distorted information, and engaged in what these days we would call black PR to discredit those deposed.[280] When the matter of the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut was discussed at the Foreign Office shortly after

[280] Immediately after the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut for example, the FO engaged in a concerted campaign to spin its own version of the story and to deny any British involvement in the deposition. Guidance telegrams were issued to dozens of missions world-wide with special attention given to the UN where there was concern that the matter might be raised in the Security Council FO/371/185527.

Labour's victory in 1964, 'the Foreign Secretary said that for purposes of presentation, it was important that no white faces should appear to be prominent in the operation. Sir W. Luce agreed, and said there would be no difficult arranging this'.[281]

3.2.1 The removal of 'prince charming': the deposition of Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim of Lahej in July 1958.

Ali Abdul Kerim had become Sultan replacing his brother Fadhl in 1952 with the support and connivance of the British, even though up to this point Lahej did not have an advisory treaty with the British Government. The official reason for Fadhl's removal was that he had killed three relatives and thus caused outrage in his family. It is more likely that he was removed because the British saw him as getting too big for his boots. Fadhl had only recently succeeded his father, Sir Abdul Kerim bin Fadhl, who died on 18 June 1947. Sir Abdul Kerim had been a good friend of the British for many decades, but always politely refused the advisory treaty offered to him, considering it demeaning. In 1948, the new Sultan, Fadhl, had gone to Cairo at the invitation of King Farouk, and there had been treated like the head of an independent country. Agitated telegrams from the British Embassy in Cairo reported:

> When his ship berthed he was met by the Governor of Alexandria, representing the King, and at Cairo Station by a Chamberlain. On 15 January when the King laid the foundation stone of a new Mosque, the Sultan was placed next below ex-King Zog (whom the Egyptians still recognise as King of Albania) and above the Princes of the blood. The Court Circular reporting the ceremony refers to him with the title of the "Sahib el Azama" which was the title given to the Sultan Fouad of Egypt before he became King. All this contrasts somewhat with the reception accorded here to the Sultan's father during his visit last year.[282]

However what concerned the British was not protocol issues but the fact that he had requested Egypt to send agricultural advisers to Lahej[283] and worse, for representation of

[281] RofE (1964), p 61.
[282] Cairo to FO 21 January 1948; FO 371/68348.
[283] Cairo to FO, 6 February 1948; FO 371/68348.

Lahej on the Committees of the Arab League. The Cairo Embassy protested to the Egyptian Government, expressing HMG 'displeasure' at the Sultan's actions'.[284] Luckily for the British, the Yemeni government, which had claims on Lahej, as on the rest of South Arabia, opposed the application. In response to enquiries from the Foreign Secretary, J.E. Cable at the Foreign Office reported that 'The present Sultan of Lahej recently visited this country and is on the whole, well disposed towards us' but added that the flattery he had received in Cairo may have given him 'an exaggerated idea of his own importance'.[285] The Foreign Office was not amused. Sir Omre Sargent, (Joint Permanent Under Secretary 1946-49), felt that the Governor of Aden should 'tell the Sultan where he gets off', adding that unless the Governor understands what he needs to do, he should 'be instructed to take direct action'. [286] This incident is important because it sets the tone for a number of future similar situations where local rulers tried to open direct relations with the Arab League. In this case, it is important to note that this was some time before Nasserism and all that it implied, and it involved a state that had no advisory treaty relations with Britain. An opportunity presented itself soon after, when Fadhl allegedly ordered the killing of three cousins he suspected of disloyalty. The British, ostensibly responding 'to demands from his brother Ali, the family of the deceased, from numerous worthies in Lahej, and from many citizens of Aden' intervened. Following some usual formalities in the form of convening the Dola – a gathering of family heads, who with the British in town with their Army did what was expected from them – Fadhl was formally deposed and replaced by his brother. Ali agreed to do what his father and brother had both refused, namely, to sign the Advisory Treaty.[287] Ali Abdul Kerim presented the British with a different sort of challenge. Trevaskis himself said that 'young, good-looking and gracious, he had the appearance of a Prince Charming'. He was also a nationalist, as he

[284] Cairo to FO, 14 February 1948 FO 371/68348.
[285] Note of J.E. Cable, 20 February 1948 FO 371/68348.
[286] Note of Sir Omre Sarjent , 24 February 1948 FO371/68348.
[287] Trevaskis (1968), p21.

admitted to Trevaskis even prior to assuming the Sultanate, but as a realist he saw "advice" as a means towards progress and modernisation.[288] He may or may not have understood that by accepting the Advisory treaty he had closed the loophole that existed in the British position, or he may not have considered it important, since as the deposition of his brother had just shown, the British ignored these legal niceties anyway when it suited them.[289]

Ali Abdul Kerim was the best opportunity the British ever had of developing a genuine, credible, and progressive local government in the WAP, and a visionary British leadership would have seized on this. The Sultan of Lahej was always considered as *primus inter pares*, by both the British and by the other tribal rulers. Lahej was by far the most developed and richest state within the WAP, and being closest to Aden it also had the closest economic and human contacts with the colony.

However, neither the Governor Hickinbotham, nor the Resident Adviser Trevaskis were visionaries. Trevaskis saw his role as that of trimming Ali's wings rather than trying to encourage him. Trevaskis considered him a 'strayed straw', adding

> On the face of it there seemed no reason why he should deprive me of one wink of sleep. He had signed his advisory treaty and had welcomed advice. He was the friendliest of persons and I was free to drop in on him whenever I wished, to talk happily about cabbages and kings for as long as I liked. Our advisory relationship with him seemed admirable and as a ruler he could not have been bettered. And yet, looking at him, I would sometimes wonder if he was not perhaps too large a person to feel comfortable for long within the narrow limits of Lahej.[290]

Paranoia? Nipping danger in the bud? Trevaskis' concerns increased when Abdul Kerim became protective of the SAL and its leaders, the Jiffri brothers. Trevaskis saw the South Arabian League as a major threat despite its mild platform and methods. There were also differences on how WAP unity could be achieved. The Governor and the Resident

[288] ibid p22.

[289] The Advisory Treaty was also strongly opposed by the Imam of Yemen who made representations through the Yemeni Legation in London and the British mission in Taiz citing the 1934 Treaty that had been negotiated with Reilly, but the FO insisted that Lahej was outside the scope of that Treaty. (Minute of W.P. Cranston, 26 July 1952 in FO 371/98564B).

[290] Trevaskis (1968), p37.

Adviser first tried to impose a top down Federation, which Abdul Kerim and other rulers immediately rejected; they then dismissed attempts at creating a federation from the bottom up, which would have had Lahej as its focal point, in the same role that Abu Dhabi came to play in the UAE; and finally they were not willing to accept the very moderate nationalism of the SAL, exiling its leaders, only to immediately see a second layer emerge of much more hardline nationalists. A question that remains largely unanswered is the role that William Luce played, or more likely, failed to play, for it was under his watch from 1956-58 that this opportunity was squandered, even if Trevaskis was most definitely the mover and shaker on the ground.

On 10 July 1958, the British Cabinet heard a report from the Colonial Secretary who said that, 'the Sultan of Lahej, who was at present in Italy, had been found to be in treasonable correspondence with the President of the United Arab Republic. He had declined to abdicate. It was proposed to depose him immediately, and in order to forestall disorder, to occupy a number of points in the Sultanate. To enable this military action to be taken in the Protectorate without delay, the Colonial Secretary wished to have authority to make statement to that effect in the House of Commons that afternoon.' Authority was given.[291]

Abdul Kerim, instead of returning to Lahej went to Cairo, as many others from WAP were to do later. When asked why he did that years later, Abdul Kerim said that he was afraid he would be arrested if he returned, and he was probably right.[292] As the story was playing out, the Lahej Army and treasury departed for Yemen. This was finally the proof that Trevaskis needed of Abdul Kerim's disloyalty – even if it happened after the British Cabinet had declared him a traitor.

What perhaps makes this story even more extraordinary is that the opportunity of using Abdul Kerim as a rallying point for more moderate nationalists was squandered a

[291] CAB/128/32.
[292] Sultan Ghalib in conversation with the author, October 2012.

second time, in 1964. Abdul Kerim, whilst on a visit to Kuwait as guest of the Kuwait government, approached the British Embassy and asked to be let back into Lahej.[293] The Kuwaitis backed the move and urged the British government to do so. The response was a definite no.[294] Trevaskis gave this background to the Colonial Secretary on Ali Abdul Kerim:

> Ex-Sultan of Lahej. Suspect (June '56) of involvement in South Arabian League activities. Known to supply money to Jiffri Family, leaders of S.A.L. Support gained from Imam of Yemen, and offered to dissidents Muhammed Aidrus and Ahi Ibubak Bin Farid. Opposed (March '58) formation of Federation of South Arabia of which he would not be head, and advocated opposition among his tribes. Ordered defection (June '58) of Lahej State Forces under Yahya Hirsi al Ba to Yemen. Recognition withdrawn (July 1958) by H.M.G. from Sultanate while abroad and re-entry to Aden prohibited. Since remained based in Cairo in close association with Jiffris and SAL. Draws stipend from Egyptian Government and continues to receive revenue from Lahej property. Connected with arms supplies to Protectorate dissidents via Yemen. Anti-British broadcaster on Cairo Radio before Yemeni revolution. Gains little publicity now with declining fortunes of S.A.L. and Egyptian backing for Aden's P.S.P.[295]

Intriguingly, there is nothing in Trevaskis' indictment that refers to secret contacts with the Egyptian government prior to July 1958 – which was the reason the Cabinet was given for his deposition. Moreover, to back up Trevaskis' assertions a letter was produced, purported to have been written by Abdul Kerim to the head of his army in 1958, ordering its transfer and that of the Lahej treasury to Yemen. A note from the Acting High Commissioner in Aden to the Colonial Secretary says that the letter 'was recently handed to the Acting British Agent at Al Ittihad by the present Sultan of Lahej'.[296] There is great doubt about the authenticity of this letter. Could this have been yet another Trevaskis ploy? Was this Keeny Meeny?

After the change of Government in London, Abdul Kerim was again in contact with the British, this time through the Embassy in Cairo. The Embassy took the view that a return of Abdul Kerim and other South Arabian dissidents to Aden would be 'a coup for us and a

[293] Kuwait to Arabian Department, 1 April 1964, CO 1055/80.
[294] Sandys to Trevaskis, 15 May 1964 CO 1055/80.
[295] Trevaskis to Sandys, 14 April 1964 CO 1055/80.
[296] Aden to Colonial Secretary, 12 February 1964, CO 1055/80.

blow to the Egyptians'.[297] But Abdul Kerim was not allowed to go to Aden, and was soon to be found in Jedda, where he remains.

3.2.2 "Our enemies" and "our friends", and how Sultan Muhammad Aidrus of Lower Yafa got into Trevaskis' black book.

Trevaskis had adopted a habit, soon after he became the British Agent in the WAP, to categorise people as "friends" and "enemies". His reports are laced with reference to "our friends" and "our enemies". This habit continued well after his forced retirement. One person that started in the "friends" category but quickly transitioned into the "enemy" category was Mohamed Aidrus, the Naib of Lower Yafa'i.

Lower Yafa'i was the largest and most populous of the WAP sultanates, but its ruler had, according to Trevaskis, been 'ill disposed towards government',[298] and had been banished for some time during the first phase of the "forward policy" but was later rehabilitated. The region was split into two areas: al-Sahel, where Government influence was predominant, and al-Haid, which Trevaskis described as 'laying in a condition of near anarchy and where government has little influence'.[299] Lower Yafa'i had been in Trevaskis' sights early on, despite the fact that the British presence there up to the mid-fifties had been very thin indeed. Trevaskis had other ideas and he proposed sending a political officer permanently based in the administrative centre, Al Qara to advise the Sultan and as 'an indication of the potential physical support which he would be able to enjoy from government'.[300] Trevaskis proposed that a process of penetration of Lower Yafai al-Haid should start, which included the building of forts, developing an army for the Sultan and various development measures. Trevaskis anticipated resistance, but said if a strong force was

[297] Note from D.J.D. Maitland (Cairo) to M.S. Weir (London) 15 January 1965 CO 1055/80.
[298] "A plan for the pacification of the Lower Yafai al Haid"; Holmes 2/ 2, p8.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.

deployed, it would 'amount to no more than sniping'.[301] The 19-page report plus five appendixes describes in minute details what needed to happen and at what cost. In many ways this was part of the "forward policy". Governor Hickinbotham had made a controversial and rare visit to the Sultan in Al Qara in 1953 – a visit that was opposed by many of the tribes and could only happen because the Sultan had bribed enough of them to make the courtesy visit possible. He was, however, soon to go in seclusion and his son Mohammed Aidrus, as Naib (a term usually associated with somebody second-in command) became the effective ruler.

Aidrus initially impressed his British mentors with his quiet dignity and enquiring mind. Trevaskis described him as 'a quiet young man with a grave look, an erect carriage and a not unbecoming hauteur'[302], and as Naib of lowland Yafa'i, that encompassed parts of Abyan where the British had successfully established a cotton scheme, he made a promising start in local administration.[303] It was Mohammed's attempts, in his capacity as *ex officio* member of the Abyan Cotton Board that first brought him into confrontation with the British. Standing up for the Yafa'i cotton producers, who were being given a worse deal than their counterparts in Lahej, and holding the British officials of the Board to account for perks that he considered unnecessary, he was perceived to be 'criticising and castigating in an uninhibited fashion'.[304] Soon, Trevaskis was accusing him of that most heinous of crimes, dabbling with Arab nationalism, and from "friend" he quickly became "enemy". A British Agency report described him in 1958 as a 'twenty eight year old qat chewing' Sultan, who had returned from the United Kingdom via Egypt in January 1956.[305] Chewing qat in Yemen could hardly be considered as unusual, let alone a crime. More relevant, as with Ali Abdul

[301] Ibid p11.

[302] Trevaskis (1968) p117.

[303] British Yemen Society; online http://www.al-bab.com/bys/articles/editor07.htm visited 24 July 2013.

[304] Trevaskis (1968), p118.

[305] Trevaskis, Precis of Events Leading up to the open hostility of Sultan Mohammed bin Aidrus al Affifii. 8 September 1958, GazAT Vol 15 p163.

Kerim, was the fact that Trevaskis thought that Mohammed Aidrus was 'too big' for Lower Yafa'i.[306] Amongst the things listed against him was the fact that 'he corresponded with the Egyptian and Sudanese governments with a view to obtaining school teachers, and was called to order in so doing by the British Agent in June 1956'[307], 'intrigues with the authorities in Baidha'[308] and attempting to 'stir up trouble'[309]. Aidrus was removed as Naib in December 1957. The event sparked demonstrations in the State Capital Jaar on 16 December and also around the same time in Aden.[310]

After a tense period of two years during which Aidrus skirmished, mostly politically, with the British, with the enthusiastic support of the SAL, the British formally replaced him as Naib on 9 January 1958 with a new man, Sheikh Haidara Mansour of the Ahl Atiya of the Bani Kaled Tribe. This decision was taken despite strong resistance from the ruling Sultan, and forced on him as "advice". On the death of the Sultan shortly after, the British then installed an eleven year old brother of Muhammad, Mahmoud, as Sultan, despite the popular demand for Muhammad Aidrus to be the new Sultan.[311]

It is not clear how far the chain of command the decision to replace Aidrus went. Since he was not officially the Sultan the decision was likely to have been taken by Trevaskis and endorsed by Luce. A broad look at the files shows a pattern in how decisions were triggered. Trevaskis as the Political Agent would start bombarding Government House (The Governor or the Chief Secretary) with reports about the seriousness of the situation, bringing it up to a crescendo and forcing a decision. Often decisions were not referred to London. But, if they involved spending money they had to. This pattern was followed, for example, in the

[306] Trevaskis (1968), p120.
[307] Precis of events; GazAT, Vol 15, p163.
[308] Baidha was where the Imam's policies towards South Arabia were executed.
[309] Precis of events; GazAT, Vol 15 p163.
[310] Ibid.
[311] In a letter to the Assistant Advisers 10 March 1960 says that the installation of Mohammed Aidrus' younger brother, Mahmoud, as Sultan on 25th February was 'a most creditable gathering' where the boy was customarily turbaned. TREV I/5/14.

case of extending the forward policy to Upper Yafa'i. First Trevaskis established the threat;[312] then he offered a solution (including a budget);[313] and since this entailed new expenditure, the matter was referred to London. London was not impressed and warned about the 'dangers of getting committed and tied up in an area as difficult and inaccessible as Upper Yafa'i'. However the Chief Secretary wrote back to the Colonial Office assuring them that what was envisaged was the establishment of a small guard force, and saying that the Governor was surprised that the official concerned, I.B. Watt, had thought it fit to refer the matter to Ministers and that the matter had only been referred to London at all because it required money.[314] Of course, as was the case with so many other similar initiatives, this was in fact the beginning of a commitment that required eventually many more resources. However, the removal of Aidrus as Naib had no immediate financial implications and available evidence indicates that the decision was taken in Aden, with London informed of a *fait accompli* later.

Aidrus, however, did not go quietly into exile and instead went to the hills to rally support. Within days of the dismissal of Aidrus as Naib the RAF had dropped thirty 1000 lb bombs on a concentration of his supporters in Ghail[315], the first of many similar operations that were to follow. Their objective was to deny Aidrus support amongst the tribes by bombing their villages, and sometimes their herding grounds if they were found to be harbouring Aidrus or his supporters. The bombings, although ostensibly not meant to kill anyone, did result in victims, including amongst innocent civilians and caused untold

[312] British Agent WAP to Chief Secretary Aden 25 March 1959, GazAT, Vol 15 pp169-70.
[313] British Agent WAP to Chief Secretary Aden 30 December 1959. GazAT, Vol 15 pp175-177.
[314] Aden to Colonial Office 27 January 1960. GazAT, Vol 15 pp180-181.
[315] GazAT Vol 15 p164.

hardship in many other ways[316]. The bombings became rich ammunition for anti-British propagandists. A broadcast, on Cairo's *Sawt el Arab* is typical:

> It is reported from Yafa'i that British air raids against tribes of the Upper Yafa'i are continuing since the Eid. British aircraft were still bombarding towns and villages, machine gunning tribesman and burning the harvest. The villages of Bi Fidah and Musala were completely destroyed, and houses and dwellings brought down upon their inhabitants. Yafa'i tribesmen addressed an appeal to Arab peoples everywhere, the Arab League, the United Nations and world public opinion calling for a halt of barbaric aggression and massacres committed by Britain in Yafi and other parts of the Arab south.[317]

Trevaskis developed some respect for Aidrus' resilience in resisting British pressure, saying 'he is not as Ali Abdul Kerim or Jiffri. He is a stubborn, courageous and determined enemy who has preferred to sit it out in Yafa'i to exhorting others to do his dirty work for him from the comfortable security of Cairo.'[318] Trevaskis adds that Aidrus, ' … is made up of very different clay to any of our other rebels. He is an idealist and is sold body and soul to Nasserism. We could never come to terms with him except on a basis of actual or potential surrender'.[319]

Trevaskis decided to finish Aidrus in 1961. The length to which Trevaskis was ready to go can be seen in the action he proposed to the Governor, which shows complete lack of scruple:

> In view of hostile propaganda which will result from any action we take in Yafa'i, there must be an adequate *"casus belli"* and action must be taken in Federal Government's name. To this end it is proposed that the Am Shaqqi Sultan and the Upper Yafa'i Sultan's garrison at Hilyan should provoke their enemies to attack them and then request the Federal Government's help. The Federal Government would accede to their request and then issue a *communique* for broadcasting and publication explaining what had happened and giving a resume of the past misbehaviour of Muhammed Aidrus and the First Naqib[320]. Following this the Federal Government

[316] The British did not always know if aerial proscription had caused human fatalities as shown in Petersen (1986), Table 3.1. There are also cases of wrong tribes being targeted. A case in point was reported by *Sawt el Arab,* in a broadcast on 14 December 1958 at 1635 GMT. (Monitoring Report 514; TREV I/3/1).

[317] GazAT, Vol 15, p172; *Sawt el Arab* at 1635 GMT on 2 July 1959 monitored by Public Relations and Information Department Aden.

[318] Holmes 2/ 2; Trevaskis to Assistant Advisers, 29 May 1961, p4.

[319] Ibid.

[320] A reference to the Sheikh of Mawseta, a leader in Upper Yafa, who was an ally of Aidrus

would issue warnings that it would take action against any persons harbouring or in any way assisting Muhammed Aidrus and the First Naqib[321]

The objective was clear:

> ….. to kick Muhammed Aidrus out of Yafa into the Yemen. The technique we are employing is the same as we used against the Ahl Bubaqr. That is to say we shall put pressure on those who harbour Muhammed Aidrus by taking proscription air action against them and will only let up when they have got rid of him. We are starting by taking action against al Qara and some of the neighbouring villages. After that we shall have to see which way he runs.[322]

This objective was achieved and it was followed by a brief lull during which both Governor and Agent expressed self-satisfaction at having pacified Yafa, in an operation directed by Robin Young, 'Order was maintained, a new administration emerged and, after a brief haroush, Muhammed's commandos faded away. The people who had retired to watch from afar, took note of the direction of the tide and came forward. There were no more cries of "Nasser" and "Long live Mohammed Aidrus". Everyone was suddenly a salaaming friend.'[323]

In truth this was the calm before the storm and Yafa was very soon to become the epicentre of anti-British resistance in South Arabia.

3.2.3 Being 'as beastly as possible'. The overthrow of Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah (1965).

For the British in the Gulf the Qawasim had always been prickly clients. From their forts in the Northern part of the Arab Gulf coast to their not insignificant Navy they posed a threat to absolute British power, and were subdued with force in 1819. In 1825 the Qawasim signed the General Maritime Treaty, and accepted British protection. The uneasy treaty

[321] "Proposed Operation to dispose of the Yafai-Ahl Bubakr Threat", Note sent by Trevaskis to the Governor, 8 May 1961, GazAT Vol 15, p 209.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Trevaskis (1968), p124-5

relationship that followed was never a happy one, particularly since the British played on disputes between factions within the ruling family, which saw the fragmentation of the Sheikhdom into several parts, and eventually coalesced into two Qawasim states: Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. In 1952, Fujairah, that had been nominally under the suzerainty of the Ruler of Sharjah was recognised by the British as an "independent" state and signed the treaties of protection. This further irritated Sharjah, where a new Ruler, Saqr bin Sultan al Qassemi had the year before taken over power.

By the middle of the 20th century, Ras al Khaimah was a shadow of its past glory, whilst Sharjah had been given a new lease of life with the stationing of an RAF staging post, which also doubled up as an airfield for civil aircraft on their way from London to Australia. The bitterness of the Al Qawasim simmered under the surface.

A Foreign Office biographical note of Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan al Qassemi the ruler of Sharjah, ahead of one of his visits to the UK in June 1962, says that 'he has charm and is a better conversationalist than most of his fellow rulers' and that 'he has been prominent among the Trucial States rulers in encouraging education in his state' with assistance from Kuwait, Qatar and Egypt. The note adds that 'Sheikh Saqr is a great admirer of President Nasser. But he has remained loyal to the British connection despite this, and despite hostile criticism from Arab nationalist press and radio directed against the British military and Air force base in Sharjah. This is not unconnected with the fact that he derives the major part of his income from the rent for the airbase'. The note adds that this amounts to £30,000 per annum.[324] Despite any political differences, relations between the British and Sheikh Saqr seemed good and friendly, however they deteriorated very quickly soon after.

In 1965, a serious dispute between Sheikh Saqr and the Residency arose from the efforts of the Arab League to involve itself in the affairs of the Gulf, initially by offering the

[324] E.F. Given, Eastern Department, 13 June 1962; RofE, 1962, p12.

impoverished Trucial States development aid. The Cairo based League was perceived at the time as very much a tool of Nasser and the Egyptian government. The League sent a fact-finding mission led by its Assistant Secretary-General, Nafwan, and then expressed an intention to set up offices in the Gulf States and proposed a £5 million development aid programme. In comparison, at the time British development aid to the whole Trucial Coast amounted to £200,000 annually, most of which was spent on recurrent expenditure.

Initially Luce, who had been trying unsuccessfully for three years to get London's permission to have Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi removed, held little hope that he could get London's permission for the deposition of Sheikh Saqr and set out to contain him instead. Luce wrote to the Foreign Office on 17 May 1965 outlining possible scenarios and proposing 'adopting a cold and distant attitude' towards Saqr, closing the Sharjah RAF airfield to civil aircraft, inciting tribal problems, and cutting of his electricity supply, adding '… we must be as beastly to him as possible.'[325] There was however as yet no talk of deposition.

That summer however, events moved fast with the Bahrain Residency bombarding London with telegrams of an impending Armageddon. Luce was not the sort of person prone to panic, and the situation does not seem to have merited it in any case. However, the tactic helped to force London's hand. After consultations in London, which involved both Prime Minister Wilson and the Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, instructions were given to Luce, which in essence allowed him to withdraw recognition from the rulers of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah at his discretion, and to extend recognition to tribes who would renounce their allegiance to the two rulers. It foresaw that 'possible consequences would be the assassination of one or both of the Saqrs by disaffected tribesmen or their deposition by other members of the Al Qasimi family angered by the consequences of their misguided policies.'[326]

[325] Luce to Brenchley 17 May 1965 FO 371/179902 RofE; 1965, p305-4.
[326] FO to Bahrain, 16 June 1965; RofE, 1965, pp388-9.

What seemed to have caused the change of heart was Luce's assertion that Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah were on the point of renouncing their treaties with Britain unilaterally and asking to join the Arab League, even though there is no proof at all that they intended doing either, despite the fact that they had openly said they would welcome Arab league economic assistance. At the Foreign Office, Sir R. Allen in a note prepared for the consideration of Ministers, and which then formed the basis of the ministerial decision, whilst stating clearly that it was 'stopping short of authorising the deposition', allowed the Resident at his discretion to withdraw recognition. The argument put forward by Allen, that seems to have tipped the balance in the thinking of the Labour Ministers was the point made in the same note, which reminded of the impact a weakening of the British position in the Gulf would have on relations with the United States.[327] Labour had been in office for less than nine months, and the Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart had only come to the job in January. There is, however, little doubt that even Labour Ministers understood what they were doing. In his autobiography, Michael Stewart says that, 'On two occasions while I was in office British Residents had to arrange for the deposition of unpopular rulers',[328] presumably the two being Sheikh Saqr and Sheikh Shakhbut a year later.

There is some evidence that Luce was "massaging" the information he was sending to London, but there could have been no doubt in the mind of anyone except the most naïve that 'the withdrawal of recognition' was essentially *carte blanche* for a palace coup. It is not clear from the records what lines of communication the Political Agency in Dubai, at the time led by Glen Balfour-Paul, had with dissident members of the Sharjah ruling family. They certainly had such contacts with discontented members of the ruling families of Ras al Khaimah and Ajman. It is also interesting that the reference to "wine, women and song"

[327] Note of Sir R. Allen to Ministers 16 June 1965; Allen's note was the basis of discussion between Stewart and PM Wilson, after which instructions were issued to Bahrain. RofE 1965, pp386-7.

[328] Stewart (1980), p232.

contained in the deposition denunciation followed the lines of a telegram that had been sent by the British Embassy in Beirut shortly before outlining the lifestyle of Sheikh Saqr during a visit to Beirut. The Embassy seems to have had him followed and gave great details about his shenanigans[329].

Within a week of the Ministerial decision, Saqr was gone. Quite what happened in those seven days is not clear, but on the morning of 24 June, members of the ruling family moved against him, issuing a statement accusing Saqr of tyranny and oppression and extravagant behaviour. The statement speaks of complaints of the populace about the extravagant behaviour of Sheikh Saqr, 'such as wine drinking and his neglect of the teaching of the Islamic religion, and his squandering of the rights of his fellow countrymen, and his wasting the funds of the country abroad on things that find favour neither with Allah nor his Prophet'. The statement adds that the country had been completely downtrodden since he took over government, and that the people of the country lived under the oppression of poverty, ignorance and disease. It concludes:

> Therefore with regard to the demands of the good interest of the country, and in order to safeguard the honour of its people, after being convinced of the unworthiness of Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan al Qasimi as ruler, we who are assembled here have decided, in our capacity as the ruling family, to depose him from the position of ruler and to appoint His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Qasimi as the new ruler of Sharjah and its dependencies, and we have sworn as our new ruler His Excellency Sheikh Khaled bin Muhammed al Qasimi and we have sworn loyalty to him praying to the Lord Almighty that his reign may be a fortunate one for this country. And God is the best witness and companion.[330]

The letter was signed by fourteen members of the Al Qassimi family. They included the new ruler and six of his brothers. None of Sheikh Saqr's brothers signed the letter. The exact circumstances of the coup are not recorded, but there was some resistance to the coup around the Ruler's palace, which was quickly dealt with, and there is no record of any

[329] Craig to Balfour-Paul; 27 February 1965; RofE 1965 p11.
[330] Bahrain to FO; 25 June 1965; RofE, 1965; p25-6.

bloodshed. The British government admitted that the Trucial Oman Scouts were used in the removal of Sheikh Saqr from Sharjah.

> At the request of the new ruler, the Political Agent asked Saqr to leave Sharjah at once, and he was flown to Bahrain in a Royal Air Force aeroplane, no civil flight being available; it is true that he was accompanied to the airfield by two British Officers and two Land Rovers carrying men of the Trucial Oman Scouts, but this was as much to protect him as to escort him.[331]

The removal of Sheikh Saqr had to be projected as having been orchestrated by the ruling family, with the British only acquiescing to a *fait accompli*. The action of removal had therefore to be accompanied by a plan of deception of international public opinion. The Foreign office issued a "guidance telegram" to its diplomatic posts in the Arab world and elsewhere, repeating that this was 'a straightforward case of the deposition of an unpopular ruler by family consensus, a traditional procedure for which there have been many precedents in the history of the Arab World.'[332]

However, A.O. Taryam who was close to the Sharjah ruling family until his death in 2014 says that 'The deposition of Sheikh Saqr would not have been decided by the ruling family had Britain not actually made the decision, and had the other rulers not given their blessing. Could the emirate then continue without a ruler? Sheikh Khalid therefore had no other choice but to accept; if he had not done so, somebody else would invariably have accepted, and in the event, Sheikh Khalid proved to be the right man for the position.'[333]

The deposition was also projected as a lesson that other rulers, especially those in the Northern Emirates, should heed. The Political Agent in Dubai, M.L. Tait, for example wrote to the Resident, 'Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan's deposition demonstrated to the malcontents that Her Majesty's Government attitude towards recalcitrant rulers was not as inflexible as it first

[331] FO to Algiers; RofE 1965; p24.
[332] Guidance telegram from the FO to certain missions, 24 June 1965; RofE 1965, p20.
[333] Taryam (1993), p50.

appeared'.[334] In many ways the removal of Sheikh Saqr was a dress rehearsal for the later removal of Sheikh Shakhbut in Abu Dhabi and others. The seamless way in which the operation had been conducted, and the acceptance of a *fait accompli* by the rest of the world, emboldened the British on this line of action.

In a final twist to this story, Sheikh Saqr took his revenge for his deposition a few days after the British ended their presence in the Trucial States. Together with a group of supporters he attacked the Ruler's Palace and killed Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed. The new Federal Government moved quickly to restore order and Sheikh Saqr was arrested. (He died in 1993). Sheikh Khalid's brother, Sheikh Sultan was declared the new Ruler.

3.2.4 The deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi by Glenn Balfour-Paul of the Foreign Office.

The deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi needs to be examined in considerably more detail than the others, not only because the issue was under discussion in the highest echelons of the British government for nearly five years, but also because Abu Dhabi in this period was rightly perceived to be on the verge of a major economic boom, and its importance for the region and indeed for Britain was deemed pivotal. In many ways, Sheikh Shakhbut presented the British with a much bigger challenge than the other cases looked at here so far, not least because he was, on things that mattered, very loyal to the British. With Shakhbut there was never any question that he was flirting with Nasserism, or any other sort of Arab nationalism, and he honoured the maritime treaties right until the end. He insisted, however, that the British should honour their part of the treaties, namely not interfere in his internal affairs. The deposition of Shakhbut was very much a British affair, despite all pretensions to the contrary. William Luce had proposed it early in 1962 shortly

[334] Dubai to Bahrain, 11 September 1965; Rof E 1965 pp44-45.

after he arrived as Resident[335]. Perhaps spoilt by the ease with which rulers in the WAP had been removed during his Governorship of Aden, or inspired, as he was accused, by the paternalistic attitude of the Sudan Civil Service[336], Luce's note to the Foreign Office was the start of a campaign that overshadowed his time in the Residency, and was only concluded successfully after he had left. The Foreign Office proved much less cavalier than the Colonial Office in the issue of disposing of local rulers. The matter was discussed by Conservative Ministers, then after 1964, by Labour Ministers, considered by Prime Minister Wilson, and finally only agreed to in 1966, by which time Luce himself had already left the Gulf. Various plans were proposed, considered, and dismissed for whichever way you looked at it the deposition was illegal and in the view of some, unnecessary. The onus always had to be on the other members of the Abu Dhabi royal family to depose their Ruler, and, having had their fair share of feuds and bloodshed at the start of the 20th century, the family proved extremely reluctant to do what British officials hoped they would.

It was left up to a Labour Foreign Secretary, emboldened by a second election victory, to give the final nod, and it was a British diplomat who had the dubious honour to deliver the final blow. It took a considerable military operation involving around 600 soldiers of the British-led and funded TOS, with RAF support, to extricate Shakhbut from Abu Dhabi, although in the end the operation was bloodless.

Shakhbut, by this time, had become an embarrassing anachronism and whilst not a security threat in the traditional sense, his failure to catch up with the times exposed the emerging British interests in the Gulf – financial and commercial rather than military and political, to considerable risk. Born in 1904, he had been absolute ruler of Abu Dhabi since 1928. A Foreign Office brief for the Secretary of State, ahead of a meeting with Sheikh

[335] Luce to Crawford, 17 April 1962; RofE 1962 p58-63.

[336] Conversation between BP officials and the FO reported in a minute by M.I. Goulding 2 November 1964; FO371/174702.

Shakhbut in London in 1961 described him as 'charming and courteous on social occasions, but he is difficult to deal with on business, being stubborn, suspicious and notoriously parsimonious and allergic to advice.'[337] Certainly up to this point the problem was perceived as one of managing Shakhbut, rather than removing him. Shakhbut, whilst always a Bedouin at heart was also well travelled, and interested in world events, which he followed closely on radio.

Before WWII the British had given very little thought to Abu Dhabi, which was one of the most backward of their Gulf dependencies. Things however changed with the prospect of large oil deposits in the territory. In the 1950s the British intervened to assert the rights of the Sheikh against Saudi encroachment in the Buraimi Oasis area. From 1955, a political officer was installed in Abu Dhabi, and in 1961, as the future importance of Abu Dhabi as an oil producer started becoming evident, the post was raised to Agency.

Up to this point there did not seem to be any problems between the British and Shakhbut. The Resident, George Middleton, was even upbeat after meeting him in Abu Dhabi in 1961, saying to the Agent in Dubai, 'Now that Sheikh Shakhbut is back to normal it really does seem as though we can begin to make some progress.'[338] Middleton's letter betrays neither a sense of crisis, nor indeed of urgency.

Oliver Miles, who at 25 was the Political Officer in Abu Dhabi in 1961, says that Shakhbut was attached to the system of relationship with Britain, and treated him and other British representatives with great respect. However Miles also remarks about the backwardness of Abu Dhabi and that it lacked any institutions of any kind. Nearly everybody lived in a palm hut, the only houses being those of the Ruler and the Political Agency and a

[337] Note of Arabian Department to the Secretary of State, 11 July 1961 RofE 1961, p3-4.
[338] Bahrain to Dubai 6 June 1960; HAW49/1/1

couple of oil company houses. Poverty he says was very striking. 'It wasn't degrading poverty. People had self-respect'.[339]

After the upgrade of the post the first Agent was Colonel Hugh Boustead, an eccentric bachelor and an Orientalist of the old school. He also had an excellent track record of implementing development and modernisation in the face of adversity. It is possible that Luce asked to take Boustead with him when he moved from Aden to Bahrain also in that year. The two were both veterans of the Sudan Political Service. The British may have understood that sending young men straight from Oxford to deal with Shakhbut (Miles was a case in point) was not good policy. Whether Boustead was a good choice is open to discussion. A comment made by Shakhbut to his successor, about how it was good to have a married man as the British Political Agent[340], may hint that Boustead was not. In any case the relationship was not a happy one, even if on the surface, polite enough.

The first hint in the archives of what was likely to follow was in a letter from Luce to the Foreign Office on 30 March 1962, stating that '…..we are likely to come to a conclusion before long that Shakhbut is not fit to remain ruler of Abu Dhabi in the new era his state is now entering.' Luce says that he had already discussed this with Stewart Crawford of the Arabian Department. 'I have also had some preliminary talk with Hugh Boustead on the subject and he shares my doubt about Shakhbut.' Luce added at the end of the letter,

> I would prefer not to enlarge at present on the general question of Sheikh Shakhbut's future. There will be a number of tests of his intentions in the near future, e.g. his attitude towards development when the Consulting Engineers produce their report at the end of May, his behaviour towards the Government Secretary (when we get one installed) and the manner in which he handles his first Royalty payments from ADMA [Abu Dhabi Marine Areas Company] later this year. I expect that by next autumn we shall be in a position to judge the prospects fairly accurately, and if Shakhbut then appears hopeless, to consider what action we can and should take.[341]

[339] IWM-O Interview with Oliver Miles recorded in 2001; Item 21597.

[340] Note from the new political agent in Abu Dhabi, A.T. Lamb to Bahrain Residency, 7 August 1965; FO371/179906.

[341] Luce to Walmsley, 30 March 1962; RofE 1962, p54.

It is therefore somewhat surprising that only two weeks later Luce felt that the situation 'was deteriorating rather rapidly' adding that, after a meeting in Bahrain with Boustead, Tripp, Johnston and Salim Ali Moussa (the Arab Assistant in Abu Dhabi), they concluded that: 'It is our considered view that, short of a miracle, there is no hope that Shakhbut will ever be capable of ruling Abu Dhabi to any acceptable standard in the new era of oil production.'[342] After making various arguments about the incompetence of Sheikh Shakhbut Luce says that 'We have therefore come to the conclusion that the only effective way of achieving our purpose is the replacement of Shakhbut by a more competent and enlightened ruler, and we consider that this should now become our aim'.[343]

However the difficulties of staging, what Luce calls 'a coup d'état in Abu Dhabi' are also highlighted in Luce's letter:

> Even if it was in our power to depose Shakhbut, we are convinced here that it would be politically most unwise for H.M.G. to take overt action to do so. We should be accused widely of interference in the internal affairs of Gulf Sheikhdoms for our own 'imperialist' purposes, and Sheikh Zaid if he succeeded would be branded as a British puppet. If Shakhbut is to be removed, it must be done through a local movement led by Zaid himself and the problem is how to bring this about.[344]

This dilemma was to dominate British relations with Abu Dhabi until 1966.

The Foreign Office reaction was cautious. In a note A.R. Walmsley of the Arabian Department describes Luce's proposal as 'a drastic step which Her Majesty's Government have no formal right to take and which has no precedent in the Gulf since 1923'. Walmsley sums up the Foreign Office dilemma of balancing the views of the "man on the spot" with larger considerations: 'It would be a serious matter to override the Political Resident's considered views on a matter of local tactics, but the external repercussions of this affair justify in enjoining special precautions.'[345] Luce was told to proceed step by step, and to try

[342] Luce to Crawford, 17 April 1962; RofE 1962 p58-63.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Note of A.R. Walmesley, 15 May 1962, RofE 1962, p67.

to draw Sheikh Zayed into taking action without explicitly promising the support of HMG for a coup d'état.[346]

After several months had passed it became clear that Zayed would not act without further British prodding, and the Foreign Office authorised a more proactive approach by Luce, namely envisaging that the ruling family signs a paper deposing Shakhbut and appointing a new ruler, and leave it then to the British to execute the deed. Another note by Walmsley went up through the chain of command at the Foreign Office and was endorsed by all, including the Lord Privy Seal (Edward Heath).[347] Further fine-tuned, it became known in the Foreign Office as Plan A, and was given approval by the Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home in May 1963.

> The plan provided for prior assurances from the leading members of the Abu Dhabi ruling family that they would appoint a new Ruler (Sheikh Zayed, Shakhbut's brother) immediately after the withdrawal of HMG's recognition of Shakhbut and that they would not in future question our public announcement that recognition has been withdrawn at the request of the family. This plan was not put into effect in 1963 because Sheikh Khalid, another brother of the ruler refused to go through with the plan and Sheikh Zaid was not prepared to go alone.[348]

Not able to secure the agreement of the family, Luce was left with issuing a stern letter to Shakhbut that resulted in some temporary improvement in the situation.[349] Luce tried to revive the plan in 1964 but was told to wait for further consultations in London in July, and after that to wait until after the British elections. In London there were still doubts if the situation was serious enough to demand extreme measures. This was the situation that existed when the Labour Government came to power in October 1964. Officials tried again with the new Ministers, who of course, when in office were torn between acting for modernisation[350]

[346] Arabian Department to Bahrain No 608 and 609, 18 May 1962. Rof E 1962 p 70-72.
[347] Note of A.R Walmsley, 26 November 1962. RofE 1962 p107-7.
[348] Note by Brencheley, 10 June 1964, which was also endorsed by Lord Carrington. FO371/174701.
[349] Luce to Shakhbut, 13 June 1963; RofE 1963 p151.
[350] This now became the buzzword. Gordon-Walker says in the first sentence of his memo to Wilson about Abu Dhabi 'I have been giving much thought to the modernisation of our relationship with the states

and the dangers of an illegal overseas adventure that could have wide repercussions in the UN and other international fora. At a lengthy meeting with Luce and senior Foreign Office officials, the new Foreign Secretary Gordon-Walker rejected the idea of an outright deposition. He was, however, willing to consider a Plan D, which was similar to Plan A, in as much that it accepted that faced with a *fait accompli* of a *coup d'état* by Zayed, whilst Shakhbut was out of the country, the British government would accept the new ruler and prevent Shakhbut from returning to Abu Dhabi 'at the family request'. The British contemplated using the Navy for this purpose since it was thought this could be done, whilst Shakhbut was away on his new yacht. The Foreign Office, however, made a caveat that the timing had to be agreed with them. Luce protested, but the Foreign Office was not convinced. Gordon-Walker referred the matter to Prime Minister Wilson, who made more caveats, and the matter arose again after the change of Secretary of State in January 1965. At this point, the situation with Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah seemed more urgent. Luce, however, must have understood that if a precedent for deposing a ruler could be established in Sharjah, then the deposition of Shakhbut would become less objectionable. The removal of Sheikh Saqr in fact became a template that was repeated later in the Gulf, a fact that did not go unnoticed amongst the other rulers.

From the Political Agency in Abu Dhabi, the Residency in Bahrain and in the Foreign Office itself, pressure mounted on ministers to remove Shakhbut. A despatch by the new Political Agent, repeated all the previous arguments but made one interesting addition, that Zayed confessed to him 'that he will not go against his brother', and added that 'the sons of Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa, the ruler's first cousin, would make the best rulers of Abu Dhabi. Although uneducated they are (with one exception) intelligent and purposeful, but unfortunately limited by their financial dependence on Shakhbut.' This is a rare occasion

and the Sheikhs in the Persian Gulf.' Patrick Gordon-Walker to Harold Wilson 18 December 1964, FO371/174702.

where British officials considered the replacement of Shakhbut not by Zayed but by another member of the family, since Zayed was failing to acquiesce.[351]

Luce's urgings were often challenged in the Foreign Office, with officials at one point producing a schedule with the pro and con arguments for the deposition.[352] The main arguments in favour of Shakhbut were that he never oppressed his own people, and had been conscientious in his loyalty to Britain over the years. In weighing the pros and cons of deposition, the Foreign Office recalled:

> …although Shakhbut is a bad ruler he is probably not the worst in the Gulf; when he was poor, he was not as corrupt as is the Sheikh of Ras al Khaimah; now that he is rich he does not squander his wealth like the Sheikh of Qatar; nor does he stir up petty border troubles like the Sheikh of Fujairah: if we once start to organise depositions, even by family consensus where does it end?[353]

Whilst Shakhbut was often accused of going into tantrums for no apparent reason, his displeasure with the British at this point had a very clear origin: a British award on a dispute that he had with the Ruler of Qatar regarding the island of Halul. Britain had decided that Halul belonged to Qatar despite the fact that Shakhbut thought otherwise and was convinced that since the British had recognised his right over the Island before, the award would be made in his favour. It was not, and he was gravely hurt and disappointed. He told Boustead soon after that 'all he had got from HMG in the way of assistance was that they had taken his lands from him.'[354]

Shakhbut's reluctance to spend money was often criticised and attributed to the fact that having experienced the dire times of the pre-oil days he was not able to handle money once it arrived in big quantities. This may very well be true, but it was more likely caused by Shakhbut's suspicion that the money tap might suddenly be closed by the British putting him

[351] Lamb to Luce 12 October 1965; FCO371/179906.

[352] Prepared originally by Mr McCarthy of the Arabian department in July 1964 the schedule lists 13 arguments in favour of deposition and 11 against, and is contained as Annex A of Report of CS Crawford, 27 November 1964 FO371/174702.

[353] Note of T.F. Brenchley, 10 June 1964. FO371/174701.

[354] Boustead to Luce, 13 May 1962; RofE 1962 p46.

in an impossible situation, in which case the money he had stashed at his palace or in his bank would have to last for a very long time. This suspicion was probably based on a deeper suspicion of the motives of the British government, and a need for self-reliance. It may have been articulated in a curious way, but in fact it is not unfounded. Balancing between spending on recurrent expenditure, investing in development and saving for posterity has been a dilemma of many countries that have become suddenly prosperous as a result of new-found wealth from natural resources. The fear of what came to be known as "Dutch disease" has worried many more administrations than that of Sheikh Shakhbut. Shakhbut would also have been aware of the implications of a sudden influx of money on the ruling family. Indeed, the mere promise of such a bonanza had already triggered the family into a huge spending spree. Boustead had even written to Luce on 25 November 1963 saying that 'The reckless spending habits of the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi are at present causing considerable concern.'[355]

The problem was, however, fast turning from simply one of good governance, with which the British government had over the years learnt to co-habit, to one that could threaten the British position in the region. In Lamb's despatch he had stated that 'Her Majesty's Government will suffer no more than criticism for tolerating such a state of affairs'.[356] The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office reacted sharply,

> Surely we ought to make it clear, even in advance of the defence review, that this is not at all the perspective in which H.M. Government see the situation. They see themselves pledged to a somewhat more rapid advancement in the Gulf than has taken place hitherto and quite apart from their own wishes, the time is moving very fast and our own position may well depend on our ability to promote and guide that advance. A failure to do so might well result in much more than "criticism."[357]

The writing was already on the wall. At the end of 1965 the first industrial dispute over bad working conditions erupted on Das Island, and the workers went on strike on 11

[355] Boustead to Bahrain 25 November 1963; RofE 1963, p141.
[356] Lamb to Luce, Despatch No 2 12 October 1965 FO371/179906.
[357] Note of P.H. Booth-Gore 28 October 1965 FO371/179906.

December, provoking an incident where a small detachment of the TOS were deployed, apparently without any proper permission, although they were withdrawn soon after. The incident had shown how, in the absence of a proper chain of command and decision-making process in the Abu Dhabi administration, things could develop in an ugly way very quickly.[358]

At this point, other players started coming into the picture. The oil companies had up till now been quite ambivalent about the issue of Shakhbut. However, on 2 November 1964, British Petroleum weighed in on the side of the Sheikh. Marek Goulding of the Arabian Department reported that at a lunch with Dr J.B. Kelly and Geoffrey Keating of BP and George Watt of Costains, he was told:

> It would be a great mistake for HMG to decide to depose Sheikh Shakhbut, even though they were strongly being advised to do so by Colonel Boustead and Sir William Luce. He (Dr Kelly) said that our present "governess" attitude to Abu Dhabi with its insistence on good administration as the *summum bonum* was misguided. It was however the natural attitude of those who had been exposed to the devoted and paternalistic atmosphere of the British administration in the Sudan. We should not be provoked by the maladministration in Abu Dhabi. The only British interests there were that the oil should flow and that the Saudis and the Egyptians should be kept out. Sheikh Shakhbut was not at present endangering these interests.[359]

Another official remarked 'we cannot ignore the paradox that representatives of important British interests do not think that those interests require the ruler's removal.'[360]

There are also some questions regarding the role that the British press played in the final decision to replace Shakhbut. A number of negative articles appeared in the media at this time. One very negative article was written by Patrick Seale of the *Guardian* in April 1965[361]. Luce, who had seen Seale in Bahrain shortly before, denied discussing Abu Dhabi

[358] Despatch No 4 of Archie Lamb to Bahrain Residency 13 December 1965 FCO371/179906.
[359] Minute of M.I. Goulding 2 November 1964; FO371/174702.
[360] FO 371/174702.
[361] The article, "Frightened oil Sheikh sits on his millions" actually appeared in *The Observer* on 11 April 1965. The article has intricate details of the goings on in Abu Dhabi that Seale could only have acquired from somebody in the British system. A telling final paragraph in the article, possibly gives a clue, "The present British political Agent in Abu Dhabi, Sir Hugh Boustead, has failed in three trying years to budge Sheikh

with him.[362] Luce said that Seale had only spent four hours in Abu Dhabi, 'and that he arrived with his mind made up to give Shakhbut a pasting', adding that 'From what Seale said to Peter Tripp on his return from Abu Dhabi, he appears to think that by writing this sort of article he can bring pressure at home to bear on HMG to take sterner measures with Shakhbut!'[363] One needs to ask if this negative media coverage was spontaneous, or if officials were adding pressure on Ministers to act.

The deposition

The British Government has over the years taken great care to try to mask its involvement in the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut. File FCO 1016/738 remains closed until 2017[364]. However, a minute-by-minute account of what took place, written in a despatch from the Acting Resident in the Gulf, Glenn Balfour-Paul to the Secretary of State Michael Stewart (Despatch No 20), has now emerged. Ironically therefore we have a fuller picture of this deposition than of the other five.[365]

Ever since the overthrow of Shakhbut was first contemplated, the difficulty was always to secure and retain the resolve of Zayed to be part of the British plan. This remained the case right until the end. Zayed visited London in the summer of 1966. Although, he was ostensibly on a private visit as guest of the Ottoman Bank, he also had discussions at the Foreign Office, was invited for a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and for lunch at 1 Carlton Gardens.[366], and it seems that during his visit he was prevailed upon to agree to the implementation of the British plan on his return.

Shakhbut. London has demurred at tough measures. Sir Hugh is retiring next month. It is to be hoped that his replacement will be given a mandate to do more than advice and cajole."

[362] Luce to Brenchley, 19 April 1965 FCO/371/179906.

[363] Ibid.

[364] The name of the file is 'Deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi by family conclave' and contains correspondence from 1966.

[365] Willoughby Papers, WILL 08/128/5 File 7/7.

[366] RofE 1966, pp79-85.

In Foreign Office Telegram 501 of the 28 July 1966 Balfour-Paul was 'authorised to inform Sheikh Zaid that, in the event of the ruling family deposing Sheikh Shakhbut and appointing him in his place, Her Majesty's Government would, on receipt of written evidence of the family's decision, be ready to recognise him as ruler and assist him in the removal of Sheikh Shakhbut.' The letter, signed by Zayed, his brother Khalid and his cousin Muhammad bin Khalifa was delivered to the Acting Political Agent in Abu Dhabi at midday on 4th August by Sheikh Zayed. Balfour-Paul says that these were the only three members of the family who mattered.

It seems that Shakhbut got an inkling as to what was going on. The 'decadent old tooth' as Balfour-Paul describes him, seems to have had a much more efficient network of informers than the British credited him with. Rumours of the discussions in London had been leaked by one of Zayed's entourage in Bahrain. Shakhbut moved quickly. He sent an emissary to summon the head of police (Mohammed bin Mubarak) who was on holiday in Beirut. He appointed a loyal person as second in command of the Abu Dhabi Army, and arranged for the army to be paid two months overdue pay.

A second reason for moving quickly was 'the expectation, based on ample experience, that Sheikh Zayed, once back home and under Shakhbut's eye, would quickly lose his nerve. He himself had no confidence in the fortitude of his co-signatories and was careful to order them to stay in Buraimi throughout the operation.'

The operation to depose Shakhbut was planned in Bahrain 'with the help of the Service Commanders and the Commander of the Trucial Oman Scouts'. According to Balfour-Paul, this involved first moving communications equipment after dark from Sharjah to Abu Dhabi on 5 August, then in the morning of the 6th, at around 11.15 two RAF Beverleys brought TOS rifle squadrons from Mirfa and Sharjah and a third squadron arrived

by land from Manama.[367] It was also necessary to secure the connivance of Col Wilson, the Head of the ADDF to provide lorries for moving the airborne TOS troops. Col Wilson also arrested his newly appointed second-in-command. Finally, the telephones to the Ruler's Palace were disconnected from the telephone exchange.

At 11.15, Balfour-Paul entered the Ruler's Palace. It is best left to him to tell the rest of the story:

> Once inside the Palace before the alarm was raised my immediate task was to engage Sheikh Shakhbut in conversation for twenty minutes or so until the net had been drawn. Playing the Walrus' part, I talked not actually of shoes and ships and sealing-wax but on the Ciceronian theme 'De Sanctute', working up to an enquiry whether he had ever considered handing over the reins of Government to a younger man.
>
> *"The eldest oyster winked his eye*
> *And shook his heavy head*
> *Meaning to say he did not choose*
> *To leave the oyster bed"*
>
> At this point the Commander of the Palace Police hastened in to announce that some soldiers from Sharjah were at the gate. Sheikh Shakhbut's comment was unwelcoming but not easily translatable. Fortunately he took no action to place the Palace in a state of siege. The gloves were now off. I told him of the family's decision and the reason for it and urged him to take up the new Ruler's option of immediate abdication and honourable departure. He was of course furious – slightly less perhaps at me than at the family's refusal to face him in person – but not actively frantic. Twenty five minutes further argument proved fruitless and having given him half an hour to reconsider his decision I withdrew, counting the number of armed retainers who stood up in the passage-way to let me pass.

After several hours of negotiations on the phone, during which Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed pleaded with Shakhbut to leave, the TOS Commander,

> Then detailed two Arab officers of the Mirfa Squadron, accompanied by two men, to go in and extract Sheikh Shakhbut. It seemed unlikely that the remaining musketeers in the Palace would put up much resistance. Nor did they. The political agent's car was sent in to the inner door. The half dozen retainers left emerged soon after, shortly followed by Sheikh Shakhbut himself. He climbed quietly into the car, raised a limp hand as he drove through the ranks of available TOS fallen in to give him (at Zaid's request) a salute, and was seen off at 1450 hours into a waiting RAF

[367] A TOS Squadron was made up of three British Officers, three Arab Officers and 145 men, which means that with the deployment of three squadrons plus the elements of the signals squadron and other support units would have meant that around 600 men – roughly half the strength of the TOS at the time, were involved in the operation.

> Pembroke by Mr Nuttall[368], whose hand he shook. An Arab officer of the TOS escorted him to Bahrain where the Ruler was, for better or worse, at the airport to receive him. So passed from the local scene, after 38 years of increasing misrule, the symbol of all that is worst in the Shaikhly system in the Gulf.[369]

Shakhbut's popularity

Throughout the build-up to remove Shakhbut from 1962 onwards, British officials in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi had constantly claimed that Shakhbut was very unpopular in Abu Dhabi and also amongst the other rulers of the Trucial States, and that his removal would be widely acclaimed.[370] There is no evidence to substantiate this; there may have been grumblings about money but never any outbreaks of protests by the people of Abu Dhabi (the strike on Das Island being an issue of expatriate labour). Indeed evidence is in fact to the contrary. The spontaneous outburst of jubilation that had been predicted on the news of Shakhbut departure failed to materialise.[371] The respect and the loyalty of the people of Abu Dhabi was perhaps best seen when Shakhbut was eventually allowed to return to Abu Dhabi on 17 December 1969. The Agency reported that:

> news of the event had obviously circulated among the bedu at tremendous speed. They came in truckloads from Al Ain and the Liwa to pay their respects. It was noticeable that of the three or four thousand who gathered at the airport the vast majority were of Shakhbut's generation. This was an Abu Dhabian occasion, remarkable for the lack of foreigners and hangers-on who normally pursue the present ruler. As he descended the gangway, the frail figure was almost bowled over by the crowd which surged forward to meet him. A few officers from the ADDF managed to make a cordon round Shakhbut and Zaid and escort them in the direction of the airport buildings. As they moved slowly forward, several of the older bedu knelt at Shahkbut's feet and others placed a garland round his neck…[372]

[368] Nuttall was the British Consular Agent in Abu Dhabi and during the operation he had taken control of the airport.

[369] Balfour-Paul to FO, 8 August 1966; WILL 08/128/5 File 7/7

[370] See for example Boustead to Luce 26 October 1964 FO 371/174702. Boustead speaks of the discontent of 'merchants and taxi drivers who are by and large the most intelligent and articulate members of the community'.

[371] Balfour-Paul to Secretary of State, op cit.

[372] Abu Dhabi to Bahrain FCO 8/1276.

More ominously the immediate reaction of the deposition of Shakhbut amongst the other Trucial States rulers was one of horror. The deposition of the Ruler of Sharjah was understandable to the rulers given his anti- British posturing, but Shakhbut, with his absolute loyalty to Britain, was a different matter completely. To make matters worse a British official had told Sheikh Rashid of Dubai, when he had raised the matter, that Britain protected the states, not the rulers. Rashid immediately let the other rulers know about this and there was talk of a public protest. This was the last thing the British wanted. They had been very careful to present the deposition as a family affair, despite the fact that few believed this.

The Damascus newspaper *al Baath* summed up the Arab reaction in an article on 10 August:

> …the British state that they had been informed – but no more – about Sheikh Shakhbut's deposition. But in doing so they deceive no one: no Trucial States sheikh can so much as appoint a new coffee-pourer without British permission, much less exile a ruler. It was not the ruling family of Abu Dhabi but British imperialism that deposed Shakhbut. Although the British may sometimes fail in similar exercises, as witnessed in Ras al Khaimah, they have no hesitation about carrying them out, as they did in Sharjah.[373]

In the end however it was left to the tact (and generosity) of Sheikh Zayed who patiently talked to the rulers one by one and persuaded them to let matters lie and to engage with him for the future. Mistrust of British intentions had, however, now reached unprecedented levels and the deposition of Shakhbut was one of a series of steps that the rulers attributed to the Labour government in Britain. This perception became embedded and persists even until today. Initially the British were also concerned about the two sons of Sheikh Shakhbut and their possible manipulation by the Egyptians. Conveniently, within a short time both Sultan bin Shakhbut and Zayed bin Shakhbut died "from drink". Neither was

[373] Quoted in Damascus to Arabian Dept, 11 August 1966 FCO 371/185528.

much liked by the British. Zayed bin Shakhbut had killed his sister for allegedly sleeping around.[374] Their deaths neatly closed the Shakhbut era.

3.3 Regime change in the not so grey areas – Oman and Qatar.

In the very final years of British rule two further leaders were removed in the Gulf, Sultan Said bin Teimur in Oman and Sheikh Ahmed al Thani in Qatar. Whilst the Aden protectorates and the Trucial states may have constituted grey areas in international law, with ambiguous and sometimes contradictory agreements that left the extent of British power open to interpretation, this was much less the case in Oman, whose relationship with Britain was more as an ally than as a possession, and not at all in the case of Qatar, after independence in 1971. The removal of the ruler there in 1972 took place when that country was already a member of the United Nations. Official deception and efforts to hide British connivance in these two palace coups is therefore more evident here than in the cases mentioned previously. In the case of Oman, the facts have emerged in one way or the other in the public domain, despite the fact that official documents remain closed. In the case of Qatar, however, there is only primarily circumstantial evidence, including the use of a pattern that had been well-tested in the past decade in other parts of the Gulf. Ministers particularly seem to have been insulated from having to take the final decision, as had been the case in the others, although it is to be assumed that they had prior knowledge that something was afoot.

3.3.1 The removal of the Sultan who 'trusted the British', Said bin Teimur of Oman (1970).

The importance of Oman as by far the largest and most strategic of the British territories in the Gulf, the rule of Sultan Said bin Teimur, and the insurgency in Dhofar that in

[374] Interview with Oliver Miles, IWM-O 21597.

the 1960s threatened to engulf the whole of the region, are too extensive to discuss in this thesis, which addresses them only in the context of why the removal of a leader who was 'as loyal as any'[375] was found necessary, and the modalities of this removal, which prove beyond any reasonable doubt that this was a British operation conducted in the pursuance of British interests. The role of British officials, including those arguing in favour and against the removal is considered, as well as the role played by British Ministers – Labour and Conservative. The decision to remove Said bin Teimur was likely being considered favourably by the Labour Government in office until June 1970, but the final approval was actually given by the Conservative government of Edward Heath, under whose watch it eventually happened. This is important because Sultan Said considered himself a good friend of the Conservative Party. In Chapter 5, I suggest that when the Conservatives were returned to government the Oman issue was one of the hottest things in their "in tray" and this may have been one of the reasons why Julian Amery was not given a Ministerial appointment at the Foreign Office, and exiled instead to Public Works, until well after the events in Muscat had played out.

Said bin Taimur had been the Sultan of Muscat and Oman since 1932, when the British ousted his father for financial incompetence. For forty years he ruled over a country with an area of 82,000 square miles occupying the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Muscat and Oman, as the country was officially called during Said's rule, consisted of two distinct geographical parts: the North East area which consisted of a fertile coastal zone and its mountainous interior, dominated by the 10,000 foot plateau of the Jebel Akhdar (the part of the country historically known as Oman), whilst to the South West, separated by 500 miles of desert, is the mountainous region of Dhofar, which was only

[375] Amery in a note to his Private Secretary said that Sultan Said had put his trust in the British and it is sad that it should have been misplaced. The note is undated but seems to have been written very shortly after the death of ex Sultan Said in 1972. AMEJ 1/9/22.

annexed to Oman in the 1880s. The population of Muscat and Oman was organised in around two hundred tribal groups and gelled together by Ibadi Islam, which recognised the local Imam as its head. The Imamate preceded European incursions that began in the 16th century starting with the Portuguese. Towards the end of the 19th century the Al Bu Said dynasty was established when the tribe led others from the interior in the occupation of Muscat. This led to a separation of power between "state" and "religion" with the Al Bu Said's Sultan ruling on the first and the Imams on the other, heralding a period of prosperity that lasted until the mid-19th century, when all was undermined by modern trading and communication techniques. Halliday argues that Oman 'did not remain stuck in the Middle Ages: it was driven back into the Middle Ages by the advance of modern capitalism'.[376]

The exposure to modernity also provoked a social backlash, and under the Imamate the tribes of the interior descended on Muscat and ransacked it, imposing strict sharia law on the town, but in 1871 the British intervened, restoring the Sultan and introducing a protectorate system that lasted for a century. British force and money had to be used on several occasions to keep the Sultan in place, until in 1920 the Treaty of Sib provided for an uneasy *modus vivendi*, which gave the tribes of the interior a large measure of control over their affairs, whilst remaining nominally in allegiance to the Sultan. This arrangement also suited the British because it gave them control over the coast, which was at that point what mattered and left the interior pretty much to its own devices, controlled from a distance by bribes and manipulation. From the moment he assumed power in 1932, Said bin Teimur proved very skilled in managing this balance, and this for four decades endeared him to the British. To do this, however, he locked the country in a time warp – isolating it completely from the rest of the world, and refusing change, with the result that by the time man landed

[376] Halliday (2002), p270.

on the moon, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman still had slaves, only three small primary schools, one hospital, no press, and a 5% literacy rate.

Whilst both the literature and the archive material offer plenty of evidence of the inability or unwillingness of Said bin Teimur to modernise his country, few satisfactorily address the question of why this was. Certainly, it was not through lack of understanding of the modern world. The Sultan travelled to Britain every year and was aware of what was "out there". He often used to entertain British officials with quotes from Shakespeare, and his apparent knowledge of the 'workings of the English mind'. Before the war he had been on a world tour that had included a stop in Washington for a meeting with Roosevelt and a tour of FBI headquarters.[377]

Nor was it through any automatic rejection of anything new or modern on religious or other grounds. In the two sectors that mattered: the military and oil exploration, Said was willing to accept modernity without needing much persuasion – even if in the first he treaded with caution. The Sultan did sometimes cite religion as a reason, for example in an interview with the BBC's Brian Barron in 1966, he said that 'in the interests of his deeply religious people changes should be gradual',[378] but there is little evidence that religion was Teimur's driving force in this or any other matter.

Takriti's thesis[379] offers the best explanation by highlighting the difference between Said and the rest of the Gulf rulers. They, regardless of the autocratic nature of their rule, were close to their people. The daily mejlis offered a constant point of contact. Their extended families allowed for networks to develop that stretched across society. None of this was the case in Muscat and Oman. Indeed, the Sultan did everything possible to isolate himself from his own people. This grew to extremes as years passed, and after 1958 the

[377] Halliday, (2002), p275.
[378] Ibid, p276.
[379] Takriti, (2011).

Sultan retired to Salalah and disappeared out of sight altogether. Even within the Royal Palace in Salalah there was a special sealed off area of the building from where four chamberlains would emerge everyday with the Sultan's instructions, to the point that some, even within the palace, thought that the Sultan was dead.[380] Takriti argues that this isolation was possible because Said felt no need to interact with his people. His power was guaranteed by Britain, and enforced by the British-supported army. His revenue before oil came from the British, and later, natural resources were exploited by a foreign company, Shell, which was encouraged to have as little contact as possible with his people. His rule was not that of an Arab despot, where the concept of Shura had to be laced in regardless of the level of tyranny, but rather that of a Maharaja – a concept imbibed during Said's six years as a student of Mayo College of Ajmer in Rajasthan, where he was sent aged twelve in 1922.[381] This isolation from, and contempt of, his own people made Said immune from their needs, and allergic even to their presence. What made this possible was the British presence, and the unusual nature of the relationship between Britain and the Sultanate.

That this situation was unsustainable, and indeed dangerous for Britain in the 1960s, was obvious. But here there was also great fear of change. Unlike in Abu Dhabi, where the risk from deposing Shakhbut was quantifiable and containable, and where, once the acquiescence of the ruling family was secured, a smooth transfer to a more enlightened ruler was assured, in Muscat and Oman the situation was full of uncertainties and a decision to depose Said was only taken once the risk of not doing so had clearly become far bigger than the risks of deposition. At this point, British interests in Oman had coalesced with those in the rest of the Gulf and were summarised in a paper in February 1970 in five points:

(a) Prevent the Sultanate from falling under communist, extreme left-wing or Arab nationalist control with the result that Stability in the Persian Gulf might be threatened

[380] Halliday (2002), p278.
[381] Takriti (2011), p144.

before British withdrawal or Britain's extensive commercial and oil interests might be threatened after withdrawal;

(b) The maintenance of the RAF staging facility on Masirah Island deemed of immense military importance[382];
(c) The maintenance of the flow of oil and the position of Shell;
(d) The furthering of British commercial interests;
(e) The avoidance of British direct involvement in military operations, as was expected by treaty and by tradition, at a time when the Sultan "was able to take the measures himself if he is prepared to do so", in other words why should we pay for it when he can afford it.[383]:

The immediate threat to these interests was the rebellion in Dhofar, which was threatening to engulf not only the whole of the Sultanate, but also the rest of the region.[384] Five possible courses of action were contemplated including an increased British military commitment; a complete withdrawal of British, and British contracted personnel; regime change; maintaining the status quo; and forcing the Sultan to conduct a comprehensive policy review in an effort to jolt him out of his complacency. The last option was the one that flagged up the least risks, and also, one suspects, bought time for Ministers who were not willing to authorise another illegal coup. It was endorsed by the Labour Government in its last weeks in office. The review took place from 2-4 May 1970 and involved the Political Resident Stewart Crawford and the Head of the Arabian Department, Antony Acland, who met the Sultan for nine hours of discussion and over dinner. The Sultan was 'polite but unyielding'. The review concluded that some progress was made and more could be obtained by keeping steady pressure on Said over a period. Events on the ground however did not allow for a leisurely course to be pursued. At this point, there were already pleas from the Consulate-General in Muscat for action. This was given a push just before the review, when, no doubt timed for maximum impact, the Adviser on Development resigned, sending in a

[382] Sultan Said had irritated the British by linking the RAF facility at Masirah, with another RAF facility at Salalah, which the MOD wanted to close down as part of its cost-cutting efforts, but which Said saw as being important for his own protection. He therefore until the end continued to link Salalah to Masirah saying if the British closed one they have to close the other.

[383] Macarthy (Arabian Department) to Crawford, Bahrain, 6 November 1969, RO, Vol 4 1969, p237.

[384] Both Halliday and Takriti offer excellent analyses of the nature of the Dhofar rebellion and its impact on the rest of the Gulf.

damning letter of resignation. He was none other than Robin Young, Trevaskis' former sidekick. Immediately following the review, there was then a dramatic deterioration in the military situation, leading to a spectacular operation by insurgents on 12 June 1970. According to Takriti this tipped the balance and convinced the British that they needed to act. The force driving the hawkish argument for the deposition of Said continued to be led by the Consul-General in Muscat, D.G. Crawford (not to be confused with Stewart Crawford who was the Resident) who up to this point had been engaged in this debate in a quasi-academic manner, but who on 17 June took the gloves off and sent through the Resident an apocalyptic despatch which forced the hand of both the Resident, and of London,[385] stating:

> If there is a general feeling in the country now, it is that the Sultan's rule cannot go on since it will lead to a takeover, after what might prove to be a bitter period of fighting by the young Omanis, encouraged by their communist supporters. The only alternative, it is generally considered, is for Sayid Tariq Talib bin Ali, working with or without Qaboos, to take over the government. Hopefully this will be done with British acquiescence, thus avoiding bloodshed but, if necessary, we would have to be shown painfully the error of our ways for our own good, since it is assumed that we are against the Communists as well.

There is a discussion in the literature as to who authorised the coup, and since the archive material is still closed this remains an area of speculation. Takriti argues that the coup was authorised by a Labour government and personally by the Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, although he adds that 'even amongst those who implemented the coup, there is an impression that it was decided upon by the Conservative government of Edward Heath.'[386] He bases his conclusion on an unpublished manuscript of the deputy to the Resident in Bahrain, Michael Weir.[387] Yet Takriti argues that the straw that broke the camel's back was an audacious insurgency operation on 12 June by nine members of National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf against the Izki Camp, which however he

[385] Report by the Consul General Muscat, "Security situation in Oman", RO, Vol 5 (1970) pp359-60.
[386] Takriti (2011), p165.
[387] Ibid.

also says, 'did not manage to inflict any serious damage on the camp or any casualties amongst the soldiers'.[388] The insurgents were chased and were either killed or captured. However, this incident prompted the Consul-General to fire the 17 June missive, which broke the last resistance from the Resident, and the plan for a coup was sent to London for approval. The general election took place a day later. It is unlikely that a Foreign Secretary would have embarked on such a high risk decision so close to a General Election. Past practices had shown that the instinct of the Foreign Office, as was shown in the case of Shakhbut in both 1964 and 1966, was to wait till after the elections, Michael Stewart himself in his memoirs speaks about the *two* occasions where he had to endorse the overthrow of Gulf rulers – the two being the 1965 deposition of Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah and the 1966 deposition of Shakhbut. He claims no ownership for the third. Regardless of this, the seamless way in which the coup was considered and planned under one administration and approved and executed by another within days of a British General Election was the best sign that "consensus" on British affairs in Arabia had returned.

The British establishment until today remains in denial that it had decided on, planned and executed the coup that deposed Sultan Said. People involved have remained largely silent and the key documents closed. Both Takriti and John Beasant[389] however give detailed accounts of how the coup that took place on 23 July 1970 was executed. Takriti is helped by the fact that some Foreign Office documents 'were released in error' in 2005 and were the subject of a BBC Radio 4 Documentary on 23 November 2009. The documents were quickly reclassified, but the cat was out of the bag, and it became increasingly difficult for those involved to keep lying.[390]

[388] Takriti (2011), p162.
[389] Beasant (2002).
[390] Takriti (2011) Chapter 5.

Therefore enough information is now available to build a picture. The pattern was now well-tested. A well-planned military operation involving the British officers of the SAF, the Consulate-General, and those elements of the British military in Oman, unfolded on 23 July in the afternoon. Sometime in the previous week London had authorised David Crawford to tell the Army to overthrow the Sultan.[391] Qaboos had earlier been approached and his support secured, although he was not to take part in any of the events surrounding the coup.

There are some minor differences in the way the coup unfolded according to Takriti, and those in Beasant's book. According to Takriti's version the operation was spearheaded by the elite Desert Regiment. In the morning Qaboos sent a letter to the Commander of the Desert Regiment, Lt Col Teddy Turnhill, informing him that he had decided to remove his father from power and calling for SAF intervention 'to maintain law and order'. Turnhill went through the motions of asking the Commander of SAF, Col Graham for instructions and he was ordered to obey Qaboos's instructions. Graham also ensured that British RAF pilots on secondment to the Sultan's Air Force were briefed so they could play a part in the coup, and he also secured the cooperation of the Officer Commanding RAF Salalah. Two elements participated in the coup, the real military force was the elite RED company of the Desert Regiment under the command of Ray Kane. However, a second element made up of Lt Said Salem al Wuhaybi, who although only a lieutenant was the highest ranking Omani officer in the SAF, with eleven men and a handful of local notables were also involved in an effort to present the event as an internal affair. According to Takriti the two groups went into the palace together, but according to Beasant, the Arab group went in first, and when it became clear that they could not complete the mission, the British-led group followed.

The operation was not an elegant affair. The Sultan resisted, and locked himself in a room and started shooting through the door. When the soldiers returned fire, he was

[391] BBC Radio 4 "Document" broadcast on 23 November 2009 quoted in Takriti (2011), p168.

wounded. Several other people were wounded and at least one killed. Sultan Said eventually surrendered and had to be taken by stretcher to the RAF station where he was patched up and then made to sign an abdication letter in English and Arabic. He was then immediately put on an RAF plane and taken to Bahrain, and from there onward to exile in Britain, never to return to Oman again.

The dirty work having been done, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who, if previous procedure was followed would have been the one approving the coup in the first place, then went through the motions of setting out to the Political Resident the conditions under which Britain would recognise the new Sultan, namely: (a) message from Qaboos confirming that he had assumed power; (b) firm recommendations from the Political Resident and the Consul-General that HMG should grant recognition; and (c) that the Foreign Office and the British government are satisfied that Qaboos appears to rule the major part of the country, that he commands the obedience of the bulk of the population; that his regime enjoys some prospect of permanency and that there is no evidence of major internal trouble.[392] From there onwards every reference to the coup in official documents speaks about 'Qaboos's successful coup against his father'[393] The coup having taken place on a Thursday, the British government decided to extend its recognition after the weekend 'to avoid strengthening suspicions, which are no doubt bound to arise, that HMG engineered the coup.'[394] As Takriti concludes, 'the coup was not simply a result of British implementation but also the outcome of British design', and that the British produced a 'mythological version of events so as to legitimise Qaboos'.[395]

[392] Douglas-Home to Bahrain; 24 July 1970, RoO, 1970 p17.
[393] Starting from a Note of JM Edes; 24 July 1970, RoO 1970, p21.
[394] Ibid p23.
[395] Takriti (2013), p193.

3.3.2 Qatar (1972): Supporting a new ruler, who wanted 'to buy everything in London'.

Qatar's treaty relationship with Britain came later than the rest of the Gulf, because until 1868 it was recognised as a possession of the Sheikh of Bahrain. But the inhabitants of Doha did not like Bahraini rule and after a series of revolts the British were minded to deal with the Qataris separately. However, Qatar remained under Ottoman suzerainty until WWI, and it was only on 3 November 1916 that Britain, in order to bring Qatar under its trucial system, signed a treaty with Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani in which Sheikh Abdullah agreed not to enter into any relations with any other power without prior British consent. Percy Cox, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, who signed the treaty on behalf of his government, guaranteed the protection of Qatar 'from all aggression by sea' and undertook to grant the Sheikh 'good offices, should I or my subjects be assailed by land within the territories of Qatar.'[396] By the early 1930s the British were already aware of the extensive oil and gas reserves in Qatar, although the announcement that oil reserves were discovered came only in 1939, and exploitation only started after WWII, with first exports in 1949.

The Al-Thani family, which had emerged from the revolt against Bahrain, as the leading family in Qatar, and was recognised as the ruling family subsequently by both the Ottomans and the British, was very fractured, even by the standards of the Gulf, and in fact has only stabilised in the last decade or two under the rule of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah – the seventh in the line of Al-Thani rulers. Sheikh Hamad became ruler after he had overthrown his father, Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad, who in turn had overthrown his cousin, Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali. (Wanting really to make a clean break with the past Sheikh, Hamad voluntarily abdicated in favour of his son Thamim, in 2013.)

[396] "19. British treaty with the Shaykh of Qatar, 3 November 1916'. Hurewitz (1979), Vol II pp75-76.

Feuds within the Qatari ruling family were particularly worrisome to the British on the one hand, but provided opportunity of manipulation on the other. At the time of independence the Ruler of Qatar was Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali Al-Thani, who by this time was firmly in the British bad books and who they feared would be succeeded by his erratic son, described by the first British Ambassador to Doha, as 'a boorish horror, and the kindest diagnosis is to conclude that he is mad.'[397]

Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani was Deputy Ruler, de facto Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Petroleum and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sheikh Ahmed was overthrown in a "bloodless" palace coup on 22 February 1972. At the time he was reported to be hunting in Iran. The official version is that the British government heard of the news on the radio. A flash telegram from the Doha Embassy to the Foreign Office says that 'Doha Radio has just announced that Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad al Thani, with the support of the family, the Armed Forces and the public has assumed the position of Head of State and Amir of Qatar.'[398] Ambassador Henderson says that, immediately after the radio announcement, he got a phone call from Sheikh Khalifa asking for recognition from the British Government, and that he replied that he would pass the request on to the Secretary of State.

What were the British grievances with Sheikh Ahmed? Having been amongst the first to benefit from oil revenues, Sheikh Ahmed appears to have been much less subservient to the British than the other rulers. A Foreign Office internal note dated 2 January 1962 described Sheikh Ahmad as 'unreasonable but is advised by a skilful lawyer'.[399] The lawyer in question, Dr Hassan Kamel, had indeed championed Qatar and its ruler, both in the arguments over the issue of the island of Halul, as well as later when the nine member Federation of Arab Emirates was being discussed. When Halul was being considered,

[397] Henderson (Doha) to Beaven (Arabian Dept.) 21 February 1972 RoQ Vol 4, 1970-71 p723
[398] RoQ, Vol 4 1970-71, p727.
[399] RofQ, 1962, p329.

William Luce remarked that 'in spite of the difficulties of Shakhbut's nature and temperament, he relies on us more heavily than does the Ruler of Qatar to look after his external affairs…'[400] Also in contrast to Shakhbut, Qatar's Ahmed liked the high life and was a big spender. The problem was that he liked to spend money on himself, and he pocketed 25% of the income of Qatar as personal revenue. It was however, on the question of the Federation that Ahmed finally burnt his bridges with the British. The issue came to a head in November 1970 when the Resident, Geoffrey Arthur, called on Sheikh Ahmed in Doha at a particularly crucial juncture when the Federation of the nine was being discussed. The usually calm and composed Mr Arthur left Qatar distinctly flustered and frustrated. He reported to the Foreign Office,

> The Ruler's bland denial of established facts and his apparent ignorance of Qatar's reputation were staggering even by Arab standards. Like so many before me, I left Qatar baffled and defeated. I feel tolerably certain that the Qataris will destroy any Union of which they are members, for they seem unable to understand that a Union implies concessions on everybody's part. I fear also that they may destroy any Union from which they are excluded. Qatar alone is right: all the others are out of step.[401]

The second issue was connected with governance. The British were not happy that the Emir seemed to spend most of his time outside his country. He was even away in Geneva on the day his country declared independence.

Thirdly, it was clear the British did not like his son, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ahmed, who was the Minister of Health, and dreaded the prospect that he may become the new Emir. They were afraid that he was preparing himself to move against the Deputy Ruler, who was their favourite. This is evident from what Henderson wrote to the FCO Arabian Department

[400] Luce to Walmsley, ibid, p397.
[401] Bahrain to FO dated 10 November 1970; Willoughby Papers 08/128/5 File 7/7.

one day before the coup. It refers to 'the instability of Abdul Aziz's character' and says that 'he has already in his short life cold bloodedly murdered 2 people'.[402]

Khalifa certainly understood what the new British interests in Qatar were. In a meeting with Henderson, a few hours after the coup was announced on radio, he asked the Ambassador to tell the Foreign Secretary that:

> he hoped that the ties of friendship between his country and Britain would strengthen and increase. His policy would be to work in the closest possible cooperation with the British government and he would be very appreciative of our help in due course for example in supplying specialists and experts. He intended to increase the economic ties between the two countries. His actual phrase was "We shall buy everything in London".[403]

Qatar had become an independent country on 10 September 1971, and was accepted as a full member of the United Nations a few days later on 21 September 1971. The British Agency became an Embassy on the same day of independence. On Independence Day the Ruler became known as Emir. Other than that very little changed immediately. The head of army was British, as were most of the other officers. The head of police was also British.

The full extent of the British involvement in the coup in Qatar as yet cannot be fully ascertained, and most of the evidence is circumstantial. Certainly it followed a pattern seen in similar previous depositions, especially the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut six years earlier – although an important difference was that Sheikh Khalifa was much more enthusiastic about deposing Sheikh Ahmed than Sheikh Zayed ever was with deposing Sheikh Shakhbut. First Sheikh Khalifa was in London a few months before the coup. There was nothing strange in this in itself except that he was lavishly welcomed by the British government with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and others directly involved in his programme.[404] Secondly, the timing of the coup - at a time when the Emir was out of the country - fitted into the

[402] FCO 8/1891; Hendersen to Beaven (FCO Arabian Department); 21 February 1972.
[403] FCO 8/1891; Confidential Telegram No 63 from Doha to Secretary of State.
[404] FCO 8/1732; Records of meetings with Edward Heath, Sir A. Douglas-Home and Lord Carrington, July 1971.

original plan to depose Shakhbut (although this plan was eventually abandoned for practical reasons). Thirdly it would have been unlikely to the point of impossibility that the coup could have taken place without at least the knowledge, but most probably the acquiescence and even participation of the British commander and officers of the army and the British Chief of Police, and it would have been not only unlikely, but actually unthinkable that these would have not informed the British Ambassador as soon as they knew what was going on. Henderson's going through the motions of sending a telegram saying that he heard of the coup on Doha Radio can therefore be dismissed as part of another deception. In fact, in the meeting that he had with Ambassador Henderson a few hours after the coup had taken place, Sheikh Khalifa 'expressed his deep appreciation for the way in which all British officers behaved. He says that they are working for the good of the country and he trusts them'.[405]

The British had learned from the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut that the most serious implications came not in the United Nations or the wider international community, but closer to home, amongst the other rulers, who became seriously unsettled every time a deposition had taken place. In the case of Qatar the British were afraid of serious fall-out in their relations with the ruler of Dubai due to the fact that the Emir was married to Reem, daughter of Sheikh Rashid, the Ruler of Dubai. It was likely for these reasons that on the eve of the coup Ambassador Henderson had prepared the ground, sending to the Arabian Department, but also copied to interested chanceries, including Dubai, what can be read as a notice of what was to unfold, saying that 'the feeling in Doha is a little tense and a stranger might even think that violence is about to break out.' He adds, 'I have no doubt that news of this trouble will have spread to Gulf posts and addressees of this letter may find some of the points I have

[405] Doha to Secretary of State; RofQ, 1971, p728.

given useful to draw on unattributably, if they wish to play down exaggerated stories which are likely to be rife in all Gulf towns, now and in the near future.'[406]

3.4 The legality or otherwise of deposition.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a discussion of the legality or otherwise of the forced depositions of Arabian Peninsula Rulers in the period between 1958 and 1972. It is however important to register that the legal implications were considered. In the case of the deposition of Sheikh Shakhbut for instance, the Foreign Office legal advice was that this was a different situation than either India in the time of the Raj, or South Arabia after the Treaties of Advice, and that an outright British deposition was illegal. This explains a lot of the concern on the form of wording and on the need to involve family members, in order that it may appear as flowing from tradition.[407] In the case of Qatar, where the state was already recognised as fully independent and a member of the United Nations, outright British intervention would have certainly been illegal. For this reason it is unlikely that the matter was formally referred to Ministers. Since in this case Sheikh Khalifa was more than happy and willing to lead the coup, all that was necessary was British acquiescence in ensuring that the British officers did the right thing, and in moving swiftly with recognition once the coup had taken place. On both accounts this was quickly and fully forthcoming.

Conclusion.

The relationship between the British establishment and the ruling families in Arabia was based on an element of mutual fascination clouded by considerable mistrust. Britain's dependence on the ruling families as the tool of choice in pushing forward its interests in the region has had mixed results, both at the time when it was the protecting power, and since.

[406] Henderson to Beaven; 21 February 1972.
[407] FO 371/174702; Annexe to report of C.S. Crawford, 27 November 1964.

British officials on the ground had fine-tuned the relationship into an art, but not always with good results.

Chapter 4. New elites and the challenge to British rule.

Whilst post-WWII society in the Gulf and in South Arabia remained largely organised on tribal lines, with a ruling family at the head, alternative societal poles started competing for power and influence. In South Arabia, Bahrain and Oman grass-root challenges to the status quo appeared to threaten British plans.

By the 1950s, comparatively strong business communities emerged in Bahrain, Aden and Dubai. British officials on the ground sometimes expressed disappointment that from these communities a politicised middle class had not emerged to act as an alternative to both the Sheikhly families and to the nationalist forces, the expectation being that a middle class would see their interest in a continuing British presence. Ahead of the LegCo elections in Aden in 1955, British officials noted with regret 'that few, of the more public spirited and capable citizens in the colony, have so far signified their willingness to accept nomination.'[408] In Bahrain, the Agent, Anthony Parsons wrote in 1966, 'The merchants, the most highly educated group in the community, are unlikely to provide the necessary stimulus [for reform]. Rapacious and factious beyond even the norm of Arab merchants elsewhere, they have had it too easy for too long. They have grown fat on their 10 per cent from *entrepot* trade and their freedom of taxation. Having contributed so little to the country for generations, they are not in the mood to start now.'[409]

There are a number of explanations for this absence. First, whenever faced with a choice, the British always opted to support the ruling families. Falle speaks of 'the tendency

[408] Aden intelligence report No 10 (October 1955) PDAW Vol 11 (1954-56) p539.
[409] Parsons to Luce, 22 November 1965; RoB (1965) p313.

of the British to rely too much on Sheikhs'.[410] In Dubai in 1938 an attempt by merchants to oust the ruling family found little resonance with the British.[411] Second, unlike the underclass in Aden and Bahrain, merchants had something to lose. They were not at all convinced that playing politics was a wise thing to do; there were too many uncertainties and not enough incentives. For most of the time the merchants watched where the wind was blowing and reacted accordingly. So merchants in Bahrain would one day close their shops in sympathy with a general strike, and the next they would be at the Ruler's court paying their respects. These merchants were in fact not financially strong enough to be able to sustain a backlash against their potential political activity.

The situation was similar in Aden. Politics came to the colony shyly, and when it did the Colonial administration was not sure how to deal with it. Governors even had occasion to complain about the lack of it. Governor Luce in 1960 concluded that the members of the Aden LegCo,

> are mediocre men, and indeed mediocrity is the hallmark of Adenese generally. Even by Middle East standards we suffer severely from a lack of intelligent, public spirited men with energy and personality who can play a really useful part in the different aspects of public life.[412]

Gavin says, 'the Hassan Alis, the Luqmans, Makawees and others long resident in the colony and interlinked by family and other ties…had provided brokers of a special type, men whose business it was to mix commerce and politics, seeking the right formulae for reconciling British administration with Arab society inside the colony and beyond.'[413] There were several British attempts to create a political force around this merchant class. The Aden Association looked for a moment as if it was going to fulfil this purpose and was, like ATUC after it, nudged on, if not actually created, by the Colonial administration. It was however a

[410] Falle, 7 June 1984, BFI/EE/T Item 27.
[411] Krane (2010), pp30-31.
[412] Luce, "Aden Colony and Aden protectorate Review of Affairs" 18 January 1960; PDAW, Vol 13 p267.
[413] Gavin (1967), p328.

very loose body, which soon fragmented in many different parts. In the 1960s, some Adeni businessmen like Luqman and Bahrooni, were to provide the last British hope of having a compliant, yet legitimate local administration, but their power base was too narrow, their interests too egoistic.

In contrast, a working class of a sort emerged in the two main British centres in the region, Aden and Bahrain as a result of the demand for labour to service both the oil industry and the military facilities.

4.1 Bahrain and the Sheikh who had heard that trade unions 'caused plenty of trouble'.

By the early 1960s, half of the population of the nine Trucial States lived in Bahrain. It reaped benefits of the modest revenues of oil exploration that started trickling in after WWII. The level of education on the island was much higher than in the other Trucial states. The Island however had its unique problems. The ruling Al-Khalifah family was of Sunni origin whilst the majority of the population was Shia[414], and there was no love lost between the two.[415] A report by a British official in 1965 summed up the situation,

> The Shia element of the population suffered much from their Sunni Rulers. The records of the Bombay Government (1856) state that "the bulk of the population of Bahrain, which is entirely distinct from the Uttoobees, who are Sunnis, consists of the original inhabitants, professing for the most part the Shia tenets of the Mahomedan faith. These are greatly oppressed and held in a most degrade state of vassalage by their Utoobee masters, of which some conception may be formed by a remark by Major Wilson in 1829 that 'the enormities practised by the Uttobeess towards the original inhabitants of Bahrain far exceed what I have ever heard of tyranny in any part of the world.'" British intervention in 1922, which resulted in the deposition of the ruler, was partly in support of the interests of his Shia subjects, and the political troubles which started in 1954 were sparked off by this long standing communal friction.[416]

[414] Lawson (2010), pp3-5, points out other divisions within these two main groups, and warns against an oversimplification of the Shia-Sunni divide.

[415] Farah (1985) offers interesting insights on British engagement with Bahrain from 1869-1915, as well as background to claims on the territory by Persia and others.

[416] Report of R.L. Morris, "Social and Labour Developments in Bahrain". RoB (1965), p407.

Iran also had a long-standing claim on the island, and this remained an outstanding issue that came up every time the future of Bahrain was discussed.

The relationship between the al Khalifa and the British developed on an understanding of mutual need. One person helped to define it more than any other. On 7 August 1925, the following advert appeared on the front page classified adverts section of the London *Times*:

> Wanted: Young gentleman, age 22 to 28, public school and/or university education, required for service in an Eastern State; good salary and prospects to suitable man, who must be physically fit; highest references; proficiency in languages an advantage. — Write, with full details, to Box S.501, The Times, E.C.4.

The job in question was for an adviser with the new Ruler of Bahrain who had been persuaded that he needed to modernise his administration. The person employed was Charles Belgrave, and he was to dominate Bahrain's life for the next thirty years. Known to his friends as Carol, and to the Bahrainis as *al Mustashar*, Belgrave is credited with establishing the first modern administration in the Gulf: with a system of civil and criminal courts, a functioning and well trained police service, widely available education and municipal services. He was also instrumental in negotiating deals with the oil companies. For many people in Bahrain however he became a symbol of a repressive Sheikhly family backed by British power.[417]

Trouble had simmered under the surface throughout Belgrave's tenure but exploded in March 1956 as the Island was caught in a wave of Arab nationalist fervour during the time of the Suez Crisis, which piled up on top of the sectarian tensions and the increasing disillusionment amongst young, now well-educated Bahrainis. A general strike followed in which around 30,000 people were estimated to have participated, many of them oil workers.

[417] *The Times*, 13 August 1956, p8.

One of the calls was for the removal of Belgrave, and reluctantly the Ruler replaced him a year later.

With enemies inside and outside the Al-Khalifah's understood that their relationship with Britain offered their best prospect. From the 1920s onward, and under the guidance of "Carol", the Al-Khalifah had proved more compliant to British rule than any of the other ruling families. When Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifah died in 1961, he was succeeded by his son, Isa, who was only 27 years old. Isa had two younger brothers, Khalifah and Mohammed. The relationship between the three brothers was delicate. They often acted in consort, dubbed by the British Agency staff as the "Magic Circle". They held weekly meetings in which major issues were thrashed out. However, they were also very different in terms of personality: Isa popular, but often indecisive, timid and lacking self-confidence, Khalifah, decisive but arrogant, Mohammed unreliable and moody. At least this is how they were perceived by the British officials who dealt with them on a day-to-day basis.[418]

By comparison to the other trucial states, Bahrain was prosperous and developed. It also had a much larger population. The revenue from oil that started trickling in after WWII was not huge but it did give the Ruler some room for manoeuvre and was one of the early examples of the 'rentier state' that was to follow in other parts of the Gulf on a much larger scale in the 1970s and later. Population and sophistication gave Bahrain the edge when talks started in the 1960s to establish a Federation of Trucial states. There were two main stumbling blocks: Bahrain wanted representation in any future Federation "parliament" to be based on population numbers, and it also wanted the capital of the new Federation to be in Bahrain. It was also understood that given that Bahrain had by far the largest number of educated persons, it would provide most of the administration of the new Federation. In essence Bahrain wanted to dominate the Federation, and the British were not averse to this,

[418] See for example RoB 1966 pp3-24, despatch of the Political Agent No 1 1 January 1967.

but the prospect was resisted by some of the other leaders. Foremost was Qatar, which had longstanding territorial disputes with Bahrain. Dubai tended to support Qatar, not least because of the family ties between the Al-Thanis and the Al-Makhtoums.

In the Gulf, it was in Bahrain that Sheikhly power was most challenged. British efforts in the other states were mainly related to managing the politics within the ruling family, in Bahrain the most serious issue was the challenge to the ruling family from without. Unlike the others Bahrain had a working class, or more precisely it had an underprivileged class, some of which was in work, but which in the absence of normal political activity, vented its frustrations and protests through labour relations.[419]

Trade Unions were banned in Bahrain in 1956 at a time of heightened tensions and troubles that saw the car of the visiting British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, stoned. The 1956 riots rang alarm bells both in London[420] and in the Ruler's Court. Several leaders of the workers movement were banished, three to a term of imprisonment on the island of St Helena,[421] and trade unions in practice stopped functioning. The Bahrain Labour Ordinance of 1958 contained numerous references purporting to regulate the constitution and behaviour of trade unions, but when in 1962 it was discovered that some Indian employees of Cable and Wireless had established some sort of workers' association there was a huge fuss, and the entity was closed down. When the Foreign Office asked the Political Agent to clarify the situation, Peter Tripp replied that 'legally trade unions could exist but the ruler had since

[419] In 1965 the population of Bahrain was 182,200. The workforce was 53,250, however, more than 20,000 were foreigners. Report on Social and Labour Developments in Bahrain, written by R.L. Morris, 10 July 1965. RoB (1965) pp408-9.

[420] Prime Minister Eden contemplated rushing troops into Bahrain, but was dissuaded by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook PREM 11/1457.

[421] The case of those imprisoned on the Crown Colony of St Helena caused embarrassment to the British government for years to come, since the three men were never considered to have had a fair trial. There were several legal challenges to the detentions in St Helena, going right up to the Privy Council. The case also became one of interest to the media. In a long article in *The Spectator* on 1 July 1960 the celebrated journalist Bernard Levin heavily criticised the imprisonment, adding 'The repute of Britain in the Middle East, especially with the forces of Arab nationalism is low. Actions such as this are not likely to increase our good standing in the Middle East, or indeed anywhere else in the world.'

1956 made it clear that none should in practice be formed'.[422] Some nudging from Britain to persuade the Ruler to allow Trade Unions found little support in the House of al Khalifah. Sheikh Khalifah bin Salman told the Foreign Office Labour Counsellor for the Middle East in 1965, 'The Arab respected authority – the Sheikh had to be seen with a sword in his hand. He had heard that trade unions caused plenty of trouble in Europe, even in England.'[423]

Thus whilst Bahrain had a work force it did not have organised labour – which does not mean that there were no clandestine workers' organisations. In 1965, there was another wave of 'well organised' strikes and disturbances[424]. The situation was so alarming that Luce asked, and was granted permission by the Foreign Secretary to use British troops in support of the local police force[425], although in the end only a naval helicopter was used. The workforce of around five thousand Bahrainis in the facilities of the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) were particularly well-disciplined and militant. (At BAPCO there was also a sizeable workforce of British and other expats, who often were used as strike breakers, and could keep the facility running at least for some limited period[426]). The 1965 strike, nearly paralysed the Island, since it also triggered sympathy actions amongst merchants, students and even civil servants. But the leadership of these actions was nebulous. Luce once more contented himself with saying that the disturbances had been organised from outside, more specifically 'an Arab Nationalist Organisation in Kuwait' which he claimed had been penetrated by the Bahrain police.[427] The British assessment was also that it was students, rather than workers, that were at the heart of the demonstrations.[428]

From 1965 until independence in 1971, the al Khalifah contained the situation using the funds that came from oil revenues. These conveniently peaked at this period. The United

[422] Note of Brenchley 14 April 1965; RoB (1965) p405.
[423] Morris Report RofB (1965) p407.
[424] Ibid p415
[425] FO to Bahrain, 13 March 1965; RoB (1965), p232.
[426] Bahrain to FO No 35, 19 March 1965; RoB, (1965), p246.
[427] Bahrain Residency to FO, 19 March 1965, RoB, (1965) p 258.
[428] Weir to PS to FS 4 April 1965; RoB (1965) p 284

Nations in an unusual informal assessment of popular will, just before the British left, concluded that the majority of Bahrainis wanted independence and not to revert to Iran. Not for the last time the ruling family announced democratic reforms, only to suspend them soon after.

4.2 The creation, celebration and damnation of the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC): Trade Unionism and Political awakening in a sleepy colony.

Aden's economic importance had exploded after WWII as a result of increased shipping that used its port for bunkering and the increasing importance of Middle East oil. In tandem there was also a sharp increase in population that rose from around 600 in 1839, to around 80,000 in 1949 to 138,441[429] in 1955. In the annual report of the Aden Port Authority for 1949, its Chairman, soon to be Governor, Tom Hickinbotham made an upbeat assessment of the Colony's future:

> The rapid expansion in the population has given rise to a housing shortage, a universal distemper, and there is still insufficient accommodation in the primary schools both for boys and girls, but in spite of this Aden has much cause for satisfaction with her steady progress. Plans are under consideration for further and greater development in the social services than ever before and it is proposed to devote no less than two million pounds sterling during the next eight years to an ambitious but carefully thought out plan, which will include a 130 per cent increase in the electric light and power plant, an enlarged and improved Civil Hospital, a technical school for boys – the first in the history of the colony – a new secondary school for boys which will give more advanced education, a new water scheme to increase the town's supply and considerable telephone development, to mention only a few of the projects proposed.[430]

In the early 1950s British Petroleum decided to build a refinery. Labour was needed for its construction, and afterwards for its operation, and within the colony there was not enough, and workers had to be brought in from neighbouring states: the WAP, Yemen,

[429] 1955 Census
[430] Port of Aden Annual report 1949, Aden Port Trust, p13.

Somalia, and even India.[431] The economic boom created new social conditions for which the colony was ill-prepared. Furthermore, whilst the Colony of Aden was a neat separate political entity created in Whitehall, its Arab population still identified itself as part of wider Yemen, and increasingly as Arab. By 1957, it was estimated that every family in Aden had a transistor radio[432], and the programme of choice was *Sawt el Arab*. This helped the process of sharpening the self-identity of the Arab population *vis-à-vis* both the British, as well as the large non-Arab population, mainly made up of Indians, Jews, Somalis and other Europeans.

In October 2012, I interviewed Ahmed Abdul Hamza in his modest home full of books in Aden's township of Crater. Speaking in perfect English he told me that in the 1940s he had been sent to Cairo to complete his sixth form. There he, and other Adenese students, had empathised with the movement of Egyptian youth against the British. They were also following the process of Indian independence. Two days before Indian independence in August 1947, four of them met at Al Azhar where their leader Mohammed el Jiffri was studying. The others were Rashid Ali Hariri, Said al Safi and himself. They agreed to set up the first nationalist movement. When they returned to Aden they started to organise and the South Arabian League emerged. By 1956 the group had grown to 43 members. Internally the group called itself the "Preparatory Committee for the National Movement", (*al-Lejna al-tahdiriyya l'il-Haraka 'l-wataniyaya*. Their aim was the unity of the south and they refused to accept the concept of separation of colony and protectorates. Another issue that greatly concerned them was the influx of foreign, i.e. non-Arab, labour. Ahmed Abdu Hamza spoke of concerns in his group at the arrival of a large number of Indians who were transiting from Africa back to India after Indian independence, and how they suspected that the Colonial administration was colluding in importing Somali labour illegally into the colony. This fear

[431] Gavin (1967) p319 discusses the impact of the refinery on social life.

[432] Speech of the Governor at the opening of the studios of Aden Broadcasting Corporation in 1957; Luce G52A.

was reinforced by the labour policy of some of the big employers. He said that for example Besse and Company – the largest business in Aden, (and whose owner later founded St Antony's College in Oxford), preferred to employ non-Muslim Indians. Ahmed Abdul Hamza explained how his movement got involved in trade union activity:

> The first time labour organised was after a labourer got hurt whilst working on the building of the refinery (the contractor was CCC of Lebanon). They refused to carry on paying his wage. His mates organised themselves. One of them Zaid Shadeq al Asdal turned up at one of our meetings and asked for help. Jiffri assigned one of the members Abdullah Obeidi, to help him. That is how trade unions started.[433]

No political parties existed in Aden prior to the first ever election in the history of the colony, the first election for LegCo held on 15 December 1955. The scope of the election was very modest. The LegCo consisted of 18 members. Nine members were ex-officio members – usually the key British officials of the Colony, whilst the other nine were termed as "Unofficial Members". Of these, three were elected – one each from three Aden Constituencies and one was elected by the Aden Municipal Council from among its members. The other five members were nominated by the Governor. Three forces formed the embryo for future parties: The Aden Association (AA), The South Arabia League (SAL)[434], and United National Front (UNF). British reports characterised the policies of the three groups as being 'Home Rule' for the AA, 'Southern Arabian Unity' for the SAL, and 'representing organised Labour' for the UNF.[435] The UNF called for a boycott of the poll due to the limited number of elected members. 46% of those on the very restricted electoral roll voted, and the election was deemed to have been won by the Aden Association.

Despite the fact that SAL had not been able to elect members to LegCo the British at this point identified it as their biggest threat, mainly due to its popularity, not in the Colony itself but in the protectorate. Trevaskis was wary early on of their activity, and of their

[433] Interview with Ahmed Abdu Hamza conducted in Aden on 9 October 2012.
[434] Most of those in the earlier "Preparatory Committee" became members of SAL.
[435] Aden intelligence Summary No 12 (December 1955) PDAW Vol 11 (1954-56) pp555-556.

influence on Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim, and saw them as a major threat to his idea of a federation of Sultanates. In 1956, the Secretary General of SAL, Sheihan Al-Habshi made a speech in which he said that SAL 'does not recognise agreements between occupiers and ignorants' (the Treaties). SAL offices were raided by the police, under Deputy Commissioner Hamed Khan on 11 August.[436] Al-Habshi was banished from the Colony and went into exile in Cairo[437], and soon afterwards, following a botched attempt to arrest him, Mohammed al Jiffri joined him.

During the raid on the SAL offices the police confiscated the organisation's documents. The Aden Intelligence Summary No 9[438] for the month of September 1956 says that an analysis of the documents 'had provided much conclusive information on the League's internal organisation, policy, membership extent of support, contacts, relations with labour and finance.' The report adds that 'the league is shown to be an organised body with five "departments" covering propaganda, labour, communications, provincial organisations and education. The organisation is still however in embryonic stage, and both the planning and the execution of the movement's activities have thus far fallen almost exclusively on the President, Sayid Muhammed ali al Jiffri, and the General-Secretary, Sheihan Abdullah al Habshi.'

The report concludes that,

> the examination of the South Arabian League papers has confirmed this body as the strongest and most influential political organisation in southern Arabia. Territorially it has during the past year penetrated the more settled areas of the WAP, and part of the Hadhramaut valley in the EAP. The leadership of the movement is in the hands of a caucus of youthful Sayids, and it includes professional men, merchants, state administrators, and land and property owners. The participation of the Sayids gives the organisation a religious appeal, which may ultimately prove important in its dealings with the ordinary people who are traditionally differential to the Sayid class.

[436] Interview with Abou Hamza op cit.

[437] Al-Habshi was allowed to return to Aden in 1964 as part of the effort to create a counterforce to Al-Asnag and the PSP, although Trevaskis himself admitted at the time that al-Habshi 'has not the qualities of leadership comparable to PSP leader Al-Asnag'. Trevaskis to Secretary of State; PDAW Vol 15, p944

[438] PDAW Vol 12, pp79-93

Importantly, the report says that as yet 'the movement has made no obvious attempt to win the support of labour.' The report warns that:

> The South Arabian League represents a distinct threat to British interests in Southern Arabia. Its influence is at present confined to certain limited sections of the population in the colony and protectorate, and the organisation is now concentrating on broadening the basis of its support. Its policy is aimed at the extinction of British influence in South Arabia, the achievement of independence, and the establishment of an Arab nationalist government.

The Colonial Government had identified the threat. How then to deal with it? In the WAP the method was classical, time-tested and straightforward, as discussed earlier, leading up to the eventual exile of the Sultan of Lahej and others. In the colony it was more complicated, for here there were no "ruling families" to act as a buffer. The main concern was with regard to labour and SAL's plans to expand in this area, and here the government was determined to take the carpet from under SAL's feet. The labour situation at the time was summarised in a report by a representative of ICFTU – the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, N. Boudadis, who went out on a fact-finding visit to Aden in early 1955. In his report he says that there were 50,000 workers in the colony, of whom a third were 'cosmopolitan workers without any roots'. The refinery had just been constructed, and that had involved 13,000 workers, but after the construction was finished it was employing 2,000, one third of whom came from Yemen and neighbouring territories. Around 3,500 were "dockers", working as casual labour in the Port through contractors. The report says that there were five Unions registered, or in the process of, the largest and oldest of which was the Union of Skilled Workers in Various Enterprises which had existed since 1951 'in the form of a friendly society', and had 2000 members. The only other significant Union was the Air Ministry Civilian Employees' Association, which was established in November 1953 with a membership of 1,500. The report mentions three other Unions, the Harbour Pilots Union,

with a membership of 25 British members, which was established in June 1952, the Aden Airways Union and the Non-Government Clerical Staff Union. On the latter two the report gives no details, since they were still in the process of formation.[439]

In the first half of 1956 the Colony saw an unprecedented and prolonged period of industrial strife and unrest that resulted in the loss of more than 210,000 working days and involved an estimated 28% of the population at great economic cost.[440] Industrial trouble also resulted in rioting and disturbances and the police had to use tear gas and rifle fire to disperse crowds.[441] The colonial administration in Aden felt that it needed to be proactive in organising labour relations. This was not unusual in itself. Indeed the Colonial Office after WWII had encouraged the development of responsible trade unionism in the colonies. After WWII as many as 19 members of the TUC Council were sent to the colonies on a full time basis to assist in the development of trade unionism. British experience of collective bargaining and industrial relations had been positive overall. It reduced the chances of wildcat strikes and provided both employers and employees with a sense of stability. There was however, a further consideration. The British government was sensitive to the prospect of communist infiltration of workers' movements and was keen to avoid that through the creation of non-communist trade unions. This was part of a global struggle for the hearts and minds of the working class. ICFTU had been created as an umbrella organisation of "free trade unions" for that very purpose with the very active support of the British TUC, and the Secretary-General of the TUC, Sir Vincent Tewson, was also its President, although its headquarters were in Brussels.

In Aden, however, it was the identification of the SAL "threat" that sounded alarm bells in Government House and added the sense of urgency in the need to deal with labour

[439] TUC 8/1,Report on Aden by N. Boudakis 18 February 1955.
[440] Aden report for the years 1955 and 1956.p5
[441] Ibid p59

relations. After the 1956 strikes, the Governor set up a Commission of Inquiry, which amongst other things, recommended that a trade union adviser, preferably from the TUC, should be sent out to advise workers and their representatives in the principles of good trade union practice. By chance, or by design, at this very moment ATUC emerged. It was established in March 1956 and the first officers were Sayed Zain Sadaq (President), Abdullah Al-Asnag (Secretary), Abdel Khalil Suleiman (Vice President), and Ali Othman (Treasurer). Almost immediately it became a partner of the British TUC. ATUC soon became the recipient of both material assistance and patronage from the TUC. By 1957, ATUC was also receiving considerable assistance from the colonial government. A representative of the British TUC, sent out in April of that year, reported that ATUC was having periodic meetings with the Governor, were represented on a number of government committees, had been given a considerable piece of land for their use by the government, and had received a structure from the Oil Refinery for their offices. Otherwise, ATUC was run on a shoe string and had no full time officials, all its officers were volunteers who turned up at its headquarters after work.[442]

Abdu Hamza says that ATUC was a 'British creation aimed at cutting SAL to size'.[443] Certainly there is proof of Colonial Government support at this stage. Also, ATUC was very keen that a union that had the support of SAL, the General Workers Union, will not be allowed to register, since, it claimed, this was a union based on racial lines (i.e., only for Arab workers). Of course this had resonance with the British TUC who took up the cause and pushed the colonial office to make sure that the new union was not allowed to function.[444] On its part, in this initial stage and indeed probably up to early 1958, ATUC tried to be what it was claiming (i.e., interested only in industrial disputes and not wanting to be politicised).

[442] TUC 8/ 1, Report of James Young 24 June 1957.
[443] Interview 2012
[444] TUC 8/1, Note by Albert Lewis 25 June 1957.

However, ATUC was not working in a vacuum and had to respond and reflect the feelings of the membership, still it is remarkable how in a very short time it came to replace SAL, in the perception of the Colonial administration, as the biggest 'threat' to British interests in Aden.

Central to the story is a young employee at Aden Airways, who in 1953, aged 19, decided not to pursue a career as a teacher for which he had been studying, but to join the small local airline, Aden Airways. Abdulla Al-Asnag was born on 17 November 1934. On 1 November 1953 he joined Aden Airways as a ticket clerk. This career move opened new possibilities. As an employee of Aden Airways, Al-Asnag was entitled to free or cheap air tickets. In 1955 he visited London twice, on the first occasion during his sick leave, and he returned there for his annual leave a few months later[445]. It is not clear how Al-Asnag got involved with trade unionism, but in between his first and second visit to the UK he established the Aden Airways Local Employees Union, and this was a launching pad for setting up ATUC soon afterward.

Before he had turned 22, Al-Asnag was already the Secretary of the Aden Airways Local Employees Union and Secretary-General of ATUC, and a member of the Executive Committee of the embryonic political formation, the United National Front[446]. He had also acquired a criminal record when in June 1956 he was convicted on two counts in connection with disturbances at Aden Airport during the visit of Lord Lloyd for which he was fined Shs 625 [approx. £32} and bound over with a personal guarantee of 1000 Shs [approx. £50] for 12 months.[447]

[445] Biographical Note on al-Asnag sent by the Colonial Office to the TUC in June 1986. TUC 8/1.

[446] The UNF was headed by the General Secretary Mohammed Abdul Noman, who in 1956 was deported from Aden because, as the Colonial Secretary told Parliament, he 'is an alien whose exclusion from Aden Colony was ordered by the Governor in the Public Interest'. (Hansard, 16 May 1956) reply of Alan Lennox Boyd to PQ by Barbara Castle.

[447] Aden to CO, 26 June 1956; repeated to TUC on 29 June 1956; TUC 8/1.

Al-Asnag had been in touch with the TUC from at least 1955, however in 1956 he returned as a guest of the Colonial Office, who also organised his visit to Transport House.[448] He was a young man of many skills. His command of written and oral English was excellent, as can be seen from his letters and communications of the time; he also very quickly mastered the intricacies of British life, yet he also had a firm understanding of his own society. He seems to have had powers of persuasion backed up by persistence and energy. Al-Asnag is often described by British people who dealt with him as "bright", "intelligent"[449], "popular", or "moderate"[450]. Was he also a British creation?

Following the 1955 report by ICFTU, and the visit of Al-Asnag, the TUC sent out two officials on extended visits to prepare reports on the situation in Aden, James Young was there from July to September 1956, and he returned in April 1957 to introduce A.E. Lewis who stayed until June. Between the first and second visits the Suez Crisis had resulted in the closure of the Suez Canal, which impacted the situation of the labour force very negatively.

In his report Lewis says, 'The TUC has established itself in the colony as a responsible organisation capable of giving assistance to the unions. The TUC is led by an outstanding personality, Abdulla Al-Asnag, who is the present General Secretary'. The report however also warns:

> Attempts to guide the Trade Union Movement from any form of political association have proved quite successful; but prospects have been somewhat marred recently by the establishment of a new General Workers Union directly sponsored by the more conservative political party, the Aden Association. The Union has just been formed and intends to cater only for the Aden born employee and to exclude all other employees from its organisation. This is the first racial union ever to be organised in Aden Colony and it is creating both political and racial friction. Representations have already been made to the government by the Aden TUC who have pointed out that the growth of a trade union sponsored from political funds is contrary to the principles that have been adopted by the rest of the Aden Trade Unions. There is every danger

[448] Grieg to Hood 15 June 1956 TUC 8/1.

[449] Little (1968), pp79-80, writes of 'the highly intelligent Abdulla al-Asnag – a man of great organising ability and eloquence who could almost certainly count more heads in his support than any other leader'. pp79-80.

[450] John Wakeham wrote to a parliamentary colleague in November 1961 describing Al-Asnag as 'a very pleasant and moderate man'. FCB 177/1A.

> that the establishment of such a union would be followed by the growth of greater political ties between the existing unions and the other two political parties which are nationalist in character. If such an unfortunate incident was to occur, it may well split the national centre. Already attempts by the new Union to organise meetings have been broken up by trade union leaders with different political views, and it is difficult to envisage how far this activity will be carried.[451]

In July 1957, Al-Asnag, whilst again in London as guest of the Colonial Office, asked the TUC for direct financial assistance.[452] ATUC had already also been accepted as an affiliate of ICFTU at a meeting of the Executive Board held in Brussels 26-30 November 1956[453], just months after its establishment. Following the Lewis report the TUC decided to accept ATUC's request for material support. On 7 August 1957 the TUC Colonial Affairs Committee:

> agreed to recommend that a duplicator and Arabic typewriter should be supplied, and that the Aden TUC should be asked to suggest the name of an officer suitable for training with a view to becoming General Secretary, after which the question of training and financial assistance could be considered further.[454]

Al-Asnag was not apolitical. He was a complex figure who was still in the formative years of his politics. Even in 1956, he is listed as a member of the United National Front – a nationalist organisation influenced by Baathism. This party was seen by the British as being based on 'young men of working class origin' but once its leader, Mohammed Abdu Noman was expelled from Aden, it faded away, and most of its activists got involved with ATUC and eventually formed their own party, the People's Socialist Party (PSP).

The British soon, and for a long time, dubbed Al-Asnag a Nasserist. In fact Al-Asnag in those years was like a butterfly flying from one flower to another. He could very well have ended at any. The TUC was sensitive and sympathetic to Al-Asnag's predicament, far more so than the colonial administration. They recognised him for what he was, a genuine, able and popular leader, who had to take into account the more radical views of some, if not most, of his membership. For, if Al-Asnag was unsure of his politics, ATUC, and its affiliates, were much more so. It was after all a platform of many different organisations and predictably included both hardliners and extremists. For it to survive and become the leading labour

[451] TUC 8/1.
[452] TUC 8/1, Letter of Al-Asnag to Sir Vincent Tewson 25 July 1957.
[453] TUC 8/1.
[454] TUC 8/1, Extract from Minutes.

force it needed to be a broad church, and this meant that it absorbed many elements that were far from completely subservient to the leadership. Indeed it was to Al-Asnag's credit that ATUC for a long time tried to avoid violence. Al-Asnag walked a very tight rope and was often in trouble with both his own people and with the British. This situation was clearly understood by Luce as late as November 1958. When during a visit to London he was asked by Tewson of his opinion on Al-Asnag, Luce replied that 'on the whole he had formed a very good impression of Al-Asnag himself; on the other hand, Al-Asnag was obviously under pressure from extremist elements in the ATUC, and in recent months things had begun to go awry'[455]. A few days later Luce wrote to Tewson from Aden, 'I am not too confident about his [Al-Asnag's] ability to restrain his hot-headed political colleagues, but I shall certainly continue to do all that I reasonably can to help him do so.'[456] As late as 19 August 1959, Luce wrote to Tewson to thank him for the contribution that the representative of the TUC (Daglish) had made in stabilising the situation around industrial relations.[457]

It is important to emphasise that from 1956, up to at least 1960, the involvement of the British TUC in Aden was at the persistent and insistent request of Luce and the Colonial Office. Luce and his team believed that the trade union movement in Aden was not capable of making up its mind, and that the British TUC was needed as a counterbalance to Egyptian nationalism and its front organisations. So what went wrong?

First – the colonial administration seems to have been under the illusion that they could influence ATUC to the point of controlling it. Certainly the relationship between Al-Asnag and Government House was close. Government House may not have created ATUC but once it was on the scene it saw it as a useful tool – to balance SAL, ensure that the latter did not have space to expand amongst the workers of the colony, and to promote harmonious

[455] Note of meeting between Luce and Tewson at the Colonial Office on 6 November 1958; TUC 8.
[456] Luce to Tewson, TUC 8/5.
[457] Luce to Tewson, TUC 8/5.

industrial relations free from politics.[458] Government House noted the positive influence of Al-Asnag, and how things could deteriorate in his absence in reports in July[459] and August[460] 1956. The speed with which ATUC came into being, was introduced to and supported by the British TUC, got affiliated with ICFTU, and received support in terms of land, office, equipment and other things from the British side in a period of less than two years, certainly proves an unusual level of familiarity. Once expectations were not met, disillusionment followed. By 1958, with the expulsion of the al Jiffris from the WAP, the deposition of Ali Abdul Kerim and the outlawing of Mohammed Aidrus, SAL stopped looking like an urgent or serious threat. If ATUC was created to fight it then it had achieved its purpose and now needed to be cut down to size.

Al-Asnag was proving to be a much more formidable political operator than the soft-spoken ticketing clerk who first came to the British attention. His ability to build relations in Britain, way beyond those suggested by the Colonial Office, including with figures in the Labour Party and the Fabian Colonial Bureau, started worrying the Colonial Office, although not as much as the fact that he was also in contact with the Arab Trade Union Bureau in Cairo, a Nasserist creation.[461] Luce likely saw this as a turning point, since it could be the bridgehead Arab nationalism was looking for in South Arabia, although it is very likely that its importance was grossly overestimated. As aforementioned, Luce was a firm believer that such bridgehead had to be avoided at all costs.[462] By 1958 the certainties of 1955 had gone. Suez had changed everything, and for the first time in a century the permanency of British rule in Aden was under question, if not as yet under threat. The message of Arab nationalism resonated throughout Aden where loudspeakers blared out the speeches of Nasser in the

[458] Aden Intelligence Summary No 6 (June 1956) PDAW Aden Vol 11 p49.
[459] Aden Intelligence Summary No 7 (July 1956) PDAW Aden Vol 11 p60.
[460] Aden Intelligence Summary No 8 (August 1956) PDAW Aden Vol 11, p71.
[461] The Colonial Office had got wind of this early on. It was raised at a meeting between the Colonial office and Sir Vincent in April 1958; TUC 8/2.
[462] See Luce 1966 valedictory. Op cit.

souks and the alleys of Crater. All sides braced themselves for confrontation. Throughout 1957, as the number of grievances grew, ATUC gave notice of a general strike. ATUC's attempts to negotiate were snubbed by the colonial administration and Luce once again sought the intervention of the TUC instead.[463] On 25 April 1958, ATUC called a general strike that was one hundred percent successful and paralysed the colony, sending a chill down the spine of the Colonial administration. After that the gloves were off.

Luce wrote to the colonial office, 'the Aden Trades Congress must continue to be regarded as the most serious threat to stability and security in the colony.'[464] Luce says that 'extremist politicians disillusioned by the ineffectiveness and disunity of the political parties have penetrated the leadership of the trade union movement. The combined appeal of worker's solidarity and extreme Arab nationalism has enabled them to obtain an absolute ascendency over labour in the colony. The strength of the congress was first shown by the complete effectiveness of a one-day general strike called on 25 April 1958, intended as a demonstration of power and unrelated to any industrial dispute.'

There were, however, aspects of this strike to which the Governor did not refer. The ICFTU had sent one of its officials to 'be an impartial observer' of the event. In his long report[465] S. Nedzynski states that the strike was 'fully effective'; that ATUC had arranged for essential services to be exempt; that the strike was 'well organised, discipline maintained throughout, and every step taken by ATUC to ensure that the strike was peaceful and without incidents. This aim was achieved with complete success'. The ICFTU rapporteur goes into great detail as to why he thinks that it was the sense of responsibility and discipline of ATUC that kept the event peaceful and without incident, and to credit Al-Asnag personally for this. The report says that there was some evidence of victimisation of strike participants

[463] TUC 8/2.
[464] "Aden: Review of Affairs in the Colony", 13 March 1959; PDAW Vol 12, p719.
[465] Report on the Mission to Aden, 25-30 April 1958; TUC, 8/2.

afterwards by the colonial government, particularly in the education section, and that he had raised the matter in a meeting with the Governor on 29 April. The report adds:

> The Governor assured me that no vindictive measures were contemplated. The discussion then turned to the three vulnerable groups: teachers, P and T employees and port workers. I found the Governor very sympathetic. He spoke very highly of Brother Al-Asnag and showed a marked and genuine appreciation for the way the strike had been conducted.[466]

Yet the strike can be seen as the turning point at which the British officials in Aden started considering ATUC and Al-Asnag personally first as a threat and soon after as an enemy. Exactly who was to blame for the tension that built up to crisis point in 1960 is not easy to say, but a spiral of confrontation, which eventually led to violence ensued. On the side of ATUC there were complaints from early on that the colonial government was taking sides against them in disputes that were purely industrial. A favourite target was Aden Radio, which Al-Asnag often accused of trying to undermine ATUC.[467] After the April 1958 strike there were accusations of intimidation of strikers. Politics moved from the streets to the columns of newspapers, but the colonial government rather than being pleased with this started legal proceedings against the Union's newspapers, as a result of which several Union officials were imprisoned. This in turn triggered rioting. Certainly ATUC's rhetoric was now being firmly influenced by the broadcasts of Cairo Radio, visible to the extent that its letterheads, which until 1957 carried the ICFTU slogan – "*Hurriya, Khubz, Salam/Freedom, Bread, Peace"* – were replaced by the Nasserist and Baathist pan-Arab slogan: "*Freedom, Socialism, Unity - Hurriya, Ishtirakiya, Wahda."* Yet the importance and relevance of the propaganda from Cairo was misunderstood in British analysis. *Sawt el Arab* was not the

[466] Ibid.
[467] See for example telegram from ATUC to TUC, TUC 8/2.

cause of anti-British feelings in Arabia, it simply articulated them in ways which made it seem like part of an unstoppable Arab nationalist movement.[468]

The withdrawal of favour from ATUC in 1958 also coincided with the events in the WAP leading to the deposition of Ali Abdul Kerim and Mohammed Aidrus, discussed earlier. In May 1958 the Governor had also introduced a state of emergency in Aden. This lasted until 30 September 1959. It seems that the policy of "nipping trouble in the bud" had reached Aden. It was also no coincidence that this was the year in which the British government had taken the first of a series of decisions to turn Aden into the centre of British military power in the Middle East. The pressure on Luce to get his house in order would have increased considerably, especially since this was also the year that the hawkish Julian Amery had become Luce's immediate boss as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. There is no indication that a formal decision to shift gear had been considered, let alone taken. Decisions look on paper as if they were taken piecemeal and separately, but there is no doubt that this was the defining year in which Britain lost those elements with whom it could have compromised in the future. The die was cast and there was no way to go back.

The demonization of ATUC

Sometime in 1964, Trevaskis produced a long and detailed paper for London providing background to ATUC/TUC.[469] Trevaskis says that 'This paper sets out the evidence of the ATUC/PSP's political activities, of its connection with a hostile foreign state and of its attitude towards the use of violence towards the pursuance of its aims.' The opening paragraph of the paper states:

> Since its formation in March 1954, the aim of the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC) has been the absorption of the whole area "from Ras Dharbat Ali in the east to Bab al Mandeb in the west and from Najran in the north to Aden in the South" into a socialist republican state akin to, and in association with, the United Arab Republic. In pursuance of this policy, the ATUC and its subsequent political wing, the People's

[468] See Sammut (2013).
[469] TREV I/3/3

> Socialist party, have obstructed the development of an independent Aden and South Arabia federation with every means at its power. It has not hesitated to misuse its trade union responsibilities to foment unrest and has actively engaged in subversion and in encouragement of the people of the federation to revolt.

The paper fails completely to mention the work that ATUC had done in its early years of existence to calm down industrial relations in Aden; it shamelessly tries to discredit the ATUC/PSP and portray them as inadequate partners in the political process. The paper uses quotes from ATUC/PSP leaders and other sources, that are often taken out of context and do not really differentiate between opinions of individual members and the leadership. It also laces in quotations from the National Liberation Front, the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Free Officers Movement, and lumps them all in together, despite the fact that even at this stage it must have been clear that these were different, and in many ways opposing forces to ATUC/PSP.

On 3 November 1964 – just days after the change of government in London, a second, much more nuanced paper was produced by the Aden Local Intelligence Committee which gives a much more balanced assessment of the ATUC/PSP, and indeed credits Al-Asnag and others with resisting pressure to resort to violence to achieve their political aims.[470] The opening paragraph states:

> The believed policy of the People's Socialist Party (PSP) during the eighteen months preceding July 1964, was considered in para 23 and 24 of the L.I.C (Aden)'s paper No SF/Pro/1002/2 of 31 August 1964, on the "Threat to the federation and protectorate". Briefly, the Party intended to use terrorist and sabotage tactics, was almost certainly responsible for the grenade outrage at Aden Airport on the 10th December, 1963 and was a willing instrument of the Egyptians.[471]

The paper then explains that in July there was a radical change in the PSP policy, largely brought about because of differences with the Egyptians and Egyptian support of the

[470] CAB 191/12 Local Intelligence Committee Aden, "Present policy of the People's Socialist Party (PSP)" 3 November 1964.

[471] Ibid.

NLF. The paper seems to be a hybrid of different opinions that could somehow not be reconciled. Then there is a gap in the archive of the regular monthly 'Political Intelligence Summaries' from Aden that Governors scrupulously sent to London. In the Cambridge Archive Editions, the editor says that 'Political Intelligence Summaries for November and December 1964 could not be found'.[472] The LIC paper suggests a change of direction in the LIC analysis. It opens the possibility the ATUC/PSP were not engaged in violence. It also introduces the NLF as a serious player, although it continues to insist that the change of fortune was due to Cairo changing sides and not to events on the ground.[473]

The process of demonising ATUC had been going on for some time. By early 1960, ATUC had been firmly pigeonholed in the category of "enemy". In his annual report at the beginning of 1960, Luce says that ATUC and individual union leaders,

> are strong Arab nationalists whose aim is to bring about the end of British rule, and who make no real distinction between politics and industrial affairs. The Congress remains the most powerful political organisation in the colony and it must be recognised that it will continue to present a major threat to security and stability. It must also be regarded as the channel which Egypt is most likely to try to use in the furthering of her own policies in this area.[474]

In Aden, and later as Resident in Bahrain, Luce had a habit of preparing London for radical action by acclimatising his political masters for what he would be asking subsequently. Luce wrote in his 1959 annual report that he was concerned with the increased number of strikes, was appointing a special adviser on Labour relations and noting that if the Unions did not cooperate, 'as is very possible, …it may then be necessary, in the light of the special adviser's recommendations to consider more drastic action to put an end to the state of affairs.'[475]

[472] PDAW Aden Vol 16 (1963/4) page xvi.

[473] CAB 191/12 Local Intelligence Committee Aden, "Present policy of the People's Socialist Party (PSP)" 3 November 1964.

[474] Governor of Aden to Secretary of State 18 January 1960, PDAW Aden Vol 13, 1959-61

[475] Ibid p 269.

So it was not a surprise that in the following year's report, the new Governor, Charles Johnston, wrote in his first annual despatch, that the Special Adviser had reported, and as a consequence:

> The industrial relations (Conciliation and Arbitration) Bill 1960 was published on the 1st August, along with a white paper on Government's policy. The response of the merchants and the public generally was favourable, but the ATUC leaders, seeing their position threatened, reacted sharply. Large labour meetings were held, feelings were inflamed and there was a risk that violence might occur by the middle of the month when the Bill came before the Legislative Council. In the event there were only token strikes, followed by a general strike, but no violence; the Legislative Council after some faltering showed an encouraging sense of responsibility; and on 18 August, the Bill became law. The threat to security was removed and in a surprisingly short time calmness returned to the colony. From that date an industrial peace has prevailed in Aden such as has not been known for many years, and no strike has yet been called to disturb the peace.[476]

In the run up to the adoption of the new laws there had been desperate last minute attempts to try to avert a head on collision, involving direct negotiations between Sir Vincent Tewson and the Colonial Secretary Lennox Boyd in London, and Al-Asnag and the colonial government in Aden. Luce's term as Governor had already finished, but he was struck down with dysentery, and had, as he had told Trevaskis[477], agreed to stay on to see through the new industrial legislation. The legislation was the last straw in the relations between ATUC and the Colonial Government. This was for everybody to see but for some reason Luce decided to push ahead with it despite the fact that several compromises, that ATUC were ready to accept, had been considered.

Johnston's somewhat triumphalist report, written at roughly the same time as Trevaskis' equally optimistic report assessing the situation in the WAP in the summer of 1960, raises very serious questions about judgement on the part of the people who were heading the British team in Aden. Of course with the benefit of hindsight we can say that the calm that the Governor was seeing was a delusion. Aden was on the eve of a massive

[476] Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 March 1961 PDAW ibid p709
[477] Luce to Trevaskis 31 July 1960, TREV I/5/7.

explosion of urban insurgency. Johnston only arrived in the Colony in October 1960, and in fact the review to which he penned his name was, in his own words 'drafted by members of my staff'. However, those who were observing the situation at the time were already seriously concerned with the tactics. Ironically but not surprisingly, this included representatives of BP. A senior BP Executive, Mr Tucker, on returning from Aden had told a British TUC official that the situation in Aden was 'very depressing and the impression is that the government had created what was almost a state of war.'[478]

The industrial laws were the start of the "war" that was to follow and which saw an increasing radicalisation of ATUC, even if this went against Al-Asnag's instincts. His increasing difficulties within ATUC made him resign as Secretary General in July 1960[479], but this resignation was not accepted, though his grip on the organisation was being eroded since he was under immense pressure from both the colonial government, and radicals within the organisation.

The enactment of the Industrial Relations Ordinance in 1960 marked the start of a period where the focus of the British government was to ensure that the Colony of Aden would be incorporated into the new Federation of South Arabia. An arduous political struggle saw ATUC/PSP defying the Ordinance and actively rejecting the Federation process. In September 1962, ahead of a crucial vote in the LegCo, ATUC again called a general strike. This time the British decided to take Al-Asnag out of the equation, and he was imprisoned for two weeks for participating in an unauthorised march just before the strike. The strike was a hundred per cent success, but unlike the strike of 1958 it was marred with rioting and violence. Regardless, the British pressed ahead securing a narrow vote in favour of the ordinance in the LegCo, on 24 September 1962, just one day before the revolution in Yemen that overthrew the government of the Imam and installed a pro-Nasserist military-led

[478] TUC 8/6.
[479] Al-Asnag to Tewson, 13 July 1960; TUC 8/6.

government. The vote was the result of considerable manipulation on the part of the Colonial Government, now headed by Charles Johnston. The LegCo, with its mix of nominated and elected officials, and with the franchise of the electors being limited to a tiny proportion of the actual population of Aden, only adopted the ordinance with a majority of one. Yet Johnston calls this 'Merger Day' a 'close shave'[480] against all odds[481], and thus, with the job done, he prepared to leave Aden.[482]

Writing to the Fabian Colonial Bureau after his release, Al-Asnag summed up his feelings, 'I have left the small prison to start again my life in the big prison known to you as the Colony of Aden with all repressive law restricting normal trade union activities and disregarding in a most clever technical legalities (sic), civil liberties in the 20th century.'[483]

The Government had, however, noticed that whenever Al-Asnag was in prison ATUC/PSP became like a headless chicken and moved to make his absence more permanent, even though it was clearly obvious to them that he exercised moderate restraint. On 21 December 1962, Al-Asnag was sentenced to one year's imprisonment for sedition – the sentence would later be quashed by the East African Court of Appeal – but in the meantime Al-Asnag stayed in prison until April 1963. As Johnston put it, 'The loss of his leadership during the winter months proved a serious setback to the PSP cause.'[484] What they seem not to have noticed was that whenever Al-Asnag was out of the way, violence increased.

[480] Aden Annual Review; PDAW (Aden) 1961-62, p894.

[481] Johnston even found it appropriate to mention in his annual report to the Colonial Secretary that the 'betting last autumn among international journalists in the St George's Bar at Beirut was four to one against merger coming off'; Aden Annual Review; PDAW (Aden) 1961-62 p898.

[482] The legitimacy of the Legislative Council existed only in the eyes of the Governor and the Colonial Office. It consisted of a mix of elected and nominated officials. Those elected had been chosen in 1959 when the electoral roll included only 21,000 of the then population which was 180,000 since it excluded all women and people who were not born in Aden. Of the 21,000 only 27% had voted in 1959, and in any case more than half of those elected by this tiny mandate had walked out from the Council before the vote, which the Governor then won on the basis of a majority of one of those that remained (excluding the nominated European members). And just for good measure the term of the Council had already elapsed and had been renewed by the Governor for another year.

[483] Al-Asnag to Margaret Roberts, 18 October 1962. FAB 365, 177/4.

[484] Johnston (1964), pp130-1.

If 1958 had been the turning point which saw the British Colonial administration change gear and turn against ATUC and the loud but peaceful Arab nationalism that it expounded, 1963 was the year in which ATUC/PSP strategy became much more anti-British. Symbolically, Al-Asnag may have remained the head of the nationalist movement but the long absences in prison at crucial moments, fast changing developments in Yemen, and increased British repression meant that the initiative was now not with him.

The extent to which the Colonial administration was engaged in trying to destroy Al-Asnag and ATUC/PSP can be seen from a message of Trevaskis to Duncan Sandys requesting more money for covert activity:

> The need to damage the political position of the PSP and our other enemies, and if possible to prevent them winning the elections is obvious. The opportunities for doing so are appreciable, provided funds are available for penetrating their organisations, suborning their key figures, stimulating personal rivalries and jealousies between them, encouraging dissension and the emergence of splinter groups, and harassing them generally, for example by breaking up public meetings.[485]

Trevaskis says that £15,000 that had already been allocated had been spent and requested a further £30,000. In Appendix VI to the same letter Trevaskis also asks for £57,000 'to aid our friends', namely parties that supported the British position.

However, whilst Trevaskis was pigeonholing the mainstream Aden politicians in neat categories of "friends" and "enemies", other more nebulous and more sinister forces were taking over the nationalist movement, and while the British kept their pressure on Al-Asnag, these forces flourished. ATUC/PSP attempts, at Egyptian instigation, to form the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY), which for a short time appeared to be the leading nationalist movement in Aden can be seen as a desperate attempt to bring all forces under a unified political umbrella, but the genie was now out of the bottle, and nobody, not even Nasser could bring it back in.

[485] Trevaskis to Sandys TREV I/6/1 Appendix V of letter 31 March 1964.

Under Al-Asnag's leadership ATUC/PSP tried to reach out to the Colonial administration on a number of occasions, but every time they were rebuffed. Probably the last chance, although it may already have been too late, was that reported by Trevaskis to the Colonial Secretary in May 1964, in which he said that during,

> informal discussions with the High Commissioner officers Al-Asnag indicated that PSP believes it has a fifty-fifty chance of winning the Legislative Council elections on a new franchise, and that if no citizenship law is effective before then their chances will still be better. Party may thus contest elections if Al-Asnag later considers success likely. He added that one of the party would accept office as Chief Minister after elections if (a) negotiations were begun to give Aden state responsibility for its internal security; (b) big amendments were made in Federal constitution, to be followed by independence for Aden state within changed federation; and (c) agreement were concluded to lease military base which should move to Little Aden. PSP superficially conciliatory attitude in these contacts was designed to project image of sweet reasonableness, to probe High Commissioner's views on political and constitutional issues and to obtain an "accommodation" with government.[486]

After the grenade attack on him at Aden airport, Trevaskis in December 1963 became convinced that Al-Asnag was behind this attack. He hints to it in *Shades of Amber*.[487] This has never been proven, and Trevaskis' only claim to proof is that Al-Asnag that day left home earlier than usual. However, regardless, Trevaskis' hostility preceded the attack, and as was a habit of Trevaskis he used the attack subsequently to justify his own prejudices against Al-Asnag.[488]

Right at the end, Al-Asnag and his ATUC/PSP/FLOSY appeared again to be in the perception of British Aden, the moderates and at least the better of two evils. It was too late. Sir Sam Falle, the British diplomat who was to play a crucial role in the last weeks of the British in Aden, says that ATUC may have done a deal in the late 1950s and early 1960s that

[486] Aden to Colonial Secretary Monthly Intelligence Summary for April 1964 5 May 1964 PDAW Vol 15, pp943-4.

[487] Trevaskis (1968), pp198-199.

[488] When I interviewed Al-Asnag briefly in London in January 2013 he agreed that Trevaskis was hostile to him long before the grenade attack.

could have also included the base.[489] But as another diplomat, Sir John Wilton, remarked, after meeting Al-Asnag in Cairo in Spring 1966, he realised that Al-Asnag 'knew in his own mind that he hadn't the political strength in the Federation as a whole to be seen co-operating with the British. But neither had he the following in the Army, or the strength up country or even the strength in Aden – his position in Aden was not unchallenged – to be able to force us out.' Wilton concludes that 'there wasn't a deal to be made with the moderate nationalists by 1967. Or even by 1966.'[490]

4.3 The NLF and the blind spot in British intelligence.

ATUC had been the primary target for British manipulation and coercion for nearly a decade. It had been weakened, and its weakness was exploited by another movement that the British had not even admitted existed until very late, and certainly knew very little about – the National Liberation Front.[491] This blind spot in British intelligence and analysis had spared it British manipulation. It was probably the only organisation in the British territories in Arabia that had not been infiltrated.

The question of why the British Colonial Administration in Aden failed to comprehend the existence, let alone the activity and strength of the National Liberation Front (a shortened version of the full name, National Front for the Liberation of the Occupied South (*al Jabha al-qawmiyyah li-tahrir al-janub al-muhtal*) until late continues to puzzle, both those who were involved in the process, and historians. Even when engaged in fighting the NLF in the biggest military operation of the Aden Campaign in Radfan, the impression was that the enemy were the usual tribal suspects, spruced up by support from Nasserist North Yemen, but little understanding that this was now a completely different configuration –

[489] Interview with Sir Sam Falle, BFI/EE/T, Item 27, 7 June 1984.
[490] Interview with Sir John Wilton, BFI/EE/T.
[491] A detailed account of the National Liberation Front's establishment and radicalisation can be found in Chapter 7 of Halliday's Arabia without Sultans.

inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology, using Maoist tactics, but firmly grounded in local society. When the insurgents eventually melted away into the mountains, the British claimed victory. Later, the Front emerged as if from nowhere to engulf all of South Arabia, and to practically annihilate FLOSY and its supporters on the streets of Aden.

The first comprehensive appraisal of the NLF was only made by the LIC (Aden) in January 1965, after Trevaskis had been dismissed as High Commissioner. The paper sticks to the narrative that the NLF was an Egyptian operation. It says that the NLF 'under the control and direction of the Egyptians in the Yemen is pursuing a policy of violence against the whole federation'.[492]

The NLF emerged in the late 1950s as an umbrella organisation for a number of small formations.[493] In charting the roots and origins of the NLF, Kostiner[494] points out that its members came mainly from the protectorates and had been involved in the turmoil of the previous decade; they were mainly inspired by Nasserism, rather than the Baathist version of Arab nationalism which was more influential amongst the nationalists in Aden. Whilst it began as an umbrella organisation that claimed that it never wanted to be a political party, in fact the NLF quickly became identified largely with one of its component parts, the Arab National Movement – the Qawmiyyun. This movement, with its roots in Beirut and amongst Palestinian groups, was itself going through a metamorphosis from Arab nationalism to Marxism. Kostiner said the nationalist SAL ended up being the springboard for the NLF. Many in the NLF leadership had started their political awareness as members of SAL in the

[492] CAB 191/12.

[493] Kostiner (1984) p54, quoting the Beirut Arab daily al Muharrir of 13 October 1964 and 18 January 1965 lists the members of the NLF in 1963 as being, *Qawmiyyun al Arab* (Arab Nationalists); *Al Jabha al Nasiriyahhah* (The Nasserist Front); *Al Munadamat at Tawriya fi Janub al Yemen al Muhtal* (the Revolutionary Organisation in the Occupied South); *Al Jabha al Wataniya* (The Nationalist front); *Al Tashil al sirri lil dubat w al janud al ahrar* (The secret organisation of free officers and soldiers); *Jabha al islah al Yafiyah* (The Yafa'i Reform Movement); *Tashkil al Qabail* (The Tribal Formation); *Al Talai at tawriyah* (Revolutionary pioneers); *Munadamat ah ahrar as Sirriyyah lil Janub al Yemen al muhtall* (The secret organisation of the free men of Occupied South Yemen); *Munadamat Shabbab mantaqar al mahra* (Youth Organisation of Al Mahrah Area).

[494] Kostiner (1984) pp53-61.

critical years 1957-58, the time when the British had decapitated the SAL's leadership driving Mohammed al Jiffri, and his sponsor, Sultan Ali of Lahej, into exile, and forcing Mohammed Aidrus out of power in Lower Yafa and into an armed struggle. By 1960 they had however become disillusioned with SAL opting for a much tougher line, but, 'despite their criticism of this organisation, the NLF founders were inspired by the protectorate-based violent struggle launched by SAL and not the urban political struggle promoted by the PSP.'[495] ATUC/PSP and their main supporters, the Baathists, had also put too much importance on Aden and failed to appreciate the importance of the hinterland, allowing the NLF the opportunity to carve a space for itself.[496]

A further element that contributed to making up the NLF was the Yemeni diaspora, particularly in the Far East. Returning Hadrami migrants from Indonesia brought with them Maoist ideas, which were particularly suitable for an insurgent movement in a rural environment, such as the protectorates, where the NLF, unlike FLOSY, had organic ties.[497] The Aden Intelligence Report for June 1955 had reported that 'In Jakarta, Indonesia, members of the Arab Community there have formed a society, the alleged aim of which is the "liberation of the South Arabian Peninsula"'[498], but subsequent to this the activities of the many Yemenis in Indonesia had dropped from the British political radar.

Yet this was only part of the story, for some of the most important leaders of the NLF, including Mohammed Ali Haytham, Ali al Bidh and Abdel Fateh Ismail joined the NLF as part of its cell in Aden College, the prestigious British education institution in Aden[499]. The Movement was thus far from being solely rural.

[495] Kostiner (1984), p54.

[496] This is suggested by the Palestinian Marxist leader Naïf Hawatmeh in "Azmat al-Thawrah fi al Yaman al Janubi" (Dar el Taliah, Beirut, 1968), quoted by Kostiner (1984) p56.

[497] Kostiner (1984), p177.

[498] PDAW Vol 11 (1954-56), p513.

[499] Dr. Abdul-Rahman Shukri who was a student at Aden College from 1959-63 says this was the best school in Aden. It was established in 1952 and was strategically situated on the border between Aden Colony and Lahej. Selection was by competition and he remembered that when he applied there were around forty

Sir Sam Falle summed up how the situation was in early 1967 when he arrived in South Arabia with a British Minister:

> …in the first two or three days we were there we had lots of interviews with many South Arabians and officials of the government and the Federal Army. And somehow one sensed very quickly that the people who really mattered were the NLF. One can't define exactly on hardened information how this was. But the impression everywhere was that underlying the future of South Arabia was the NLF, and they were tough and determined and they were on the ground. We were told for example that the NLF shot to kill but FLOSY shot to maim. FLOSY had their bases in the Yemen and was supported by Egypt. The NLF had their bases right there in South Arabia, Aden and right through the territory and they were working and shooting. They were clearly the effective grass roots nationalist movement. And that seemed obvious when we had been there for three days.[500]

Falle says that he was invited by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Federation for a "Qat Chew" at his home. Amongst the guests was one,

> straight out of a horror movie. Little guy with a clubbed foot and two guns. The other was a very smooth American graduate. And both South Arabians. And there we got into a cheerful conversation. They were of course representatives of the NLF. And I think this was the first peaceful friendly meeting they'd had with a western representative rather than in an interrogation room in prison, and I explained to them that Lord Shackleton had come to seek a peaceful settlement in Aden and negotiate the best way towards independence.[501]

Falle asked them to stop shooting the British, but they said it was not possible:

> You must understand, FLOSY constantly accuse us of being the running dogs of the imperialists, and if we at this moment are seen talking to you this would simply give credence to their story that they are the sole representatives of South Arabia and we are imperialist lackeys, and so Abu Sami[502] we are very sorry but we have got to drive you out of Aden. When we have reached that stage we can negotiate.[503]

Another person who was in the new British team in Aden was Oliver Miles. He also came in touch with the NLF at this point, and describes them as much more revolutionary,

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others from Lahej who also set the entrance examination, but he was the only one who passed. He spoke about a 'discipline that changed persons'. Shukri went on to study engineering in the UK and later served as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Housing until 1994 when like many other senior officials in South Yemen he was forcefully retired. (Interview for this thesis with Dr Shukri in Aden on 9 October 2012).

[500] Sir Sam Falle, interviewed on 7 June 1984 BFI/EE/T Item 27.

[501] Ibid.

[502] This was what the NLF officials called Sir Sam during the meeting.

[503] Falle interview, op cit..

committed to some kind of communist ideology and much less influenced by Cairo. Speaking in 2001 he said, 'they remain to me very much a mystery. I still don't really know where they came from or how they developed. They were a rather sinister force. They were much more efficiently organised. They were much tougher than FLOSY and in the end they won. And they won on a genuine independence ticket.'[504]

He adds, 'The NLF remained extremely secretive, mysterious and we couldn't really make any contact with any effective leaders in the NLF. We didn't know who the leaders of the NLF were and we wanted to hand over all sorts of practical things.' Miles says that it wasn't until a month before the British departure from Aden that the NLF was persuaded to come out of its shell. With them was a 'young interpreter from the tribal areas who had somehow become a Maoist.'[505]

There are a number of possible explanations for this major flaw in British intelligence and analysis. It could be that the Colonial Administration in Aden was so blinded with hatred of ATUC and Al-Asnag that they could not see any other enemy. Dresch and others speak of a 'pathological reluctance' of the British to deal with Al-Asnag and ATUC.[506] Certainly as has already been argued, Trevaskis had a habit of seeing things in black and white, and once he convinced himself of an enemy he was very difficult to dissuade. It is also possible that the *Keeny Meeny* tactics may have not been as clever and useful as those employing them, like Robin Young, thought. It is quite possible that informers, once they got an idea of what their controllers wanted to hear, may have fabricated information in order to keep their value up like characters in a Le Carre novel, and whilst this may sound trivial it should not be excluded.[507] Certainly Trevaskis was under the impression that he knew 'almost everything worth knowing about the pettiest tribal leader' in the WAP, 'from the calibre of his rifle to his

[504] Interview with Oliver Miles, IWM–O Item No 21597.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Dresch, p99.
[507] The military certainly had reports that FRA sometimes faked attacks so that they could claim new ammunition, which they then gave to the insurgents.

marriage alliance'.[508] There was of course also a flaw in the analysis, due to what Mawby calls an orientalist reading of intelligence, which could not accept that what the British were dealing with was a home grown liberation movement, but could only understand it in the context of a big Nasserist conspiracy.[509] Trevaskis' personality and way of thinking contributed a lot to this weakness. And in this the British may have fallen victim of the disinformation – or more precisely the colourful language of exaggeration, of *Sawt el-Arab*, which happily claimed responsibility on behalf of Nasserism for every single anti-British act in the Middle East. A mixture of all these factors is likely to have caused the British lapse.

There is one further possible explanation as to why the NLF managed to avoid infiltration. Its rise coincides with the defection of Kim Philby to Moscow in January 1963. Philby had been living in Beirut since 1956, and although no longer working for MI6, he was close to British officials. The night he defected he was supposed to be having dinner with Glen Balfour-Paul at the British Embassy. It is not known if Philby had contacts with NLF activists from South Arabia, either in Beirut, during a visit to Yemen on a journalistic assignment in October 1962, or later in the USSR. Certainly, the KGB would have squeezed from Philby any single piece of information about his work, and his Middle East exposure was the most recent. Philby would have been able to say a lot about British tactics, as well as about methods of infiltration and how to avoid them. Whilst there is no hard evidence of this, it is plausible, and Philby's name came up, without prompting, in conversations with Arab veterans of South Arabia during my interviews in Aden in October 2012, even though the connection was never fully explained.

By this time South Arabia, far from being the simplistic black and white, "our friends and our enemies" setting that Trevaskis had insisted on depicting, had become a complex arena for Arab politics to play out, and fight out through proxies, in very much the same way

[508] Trevaskis (1968), p219.
[509] Mawby (2010).

that it did a decade later in Beirut, and Lebanon generally. Ironically, the instrument that was ultimately used by the NLF to take over power was the one that had been created to prevent such an eventuality – the Federal Regular Army (FRA).

The FRA had been created from the structures of the APL, as the military arm of the newly established "Federation of Arab Emirates of the South", and their allegiance moved formally from being to the Queen to the Federation on 30 November 1961.[510] What happened to this armed force in the subsequent six years largely defined the future of South Arabia.

At the end of 1961 the strength of the FRA was about 4,500 officers and men, including 400 seconded British personnel'.[511] According to General Sir James Lunt, the first FRA Commander (1961-64), 'All the COs were British. In every battalion we had four, five, six British officers, many British Warrant Officers and NCOs. They called the shots.'[512] On 1 June 1967, the Federal Regular Army was unified with a tribal force that had operated as a kind of gendarmerie called the Federal Guard[513], and the unified force was called the South Arabian Army until independence a few months later.

FRA was the only Federal institution that actually functioned reasonably coherently throughout the Federation's short and troubled history. For the British it was therefore particularly distressing that it was the FRA that eventually not only imploded in the most dramatic of ways, but also became the main instrument through which the NLF eventually seized power. The FRA was for the British both plan A and plan B. Whilst its original purpose was to prop up the Federation of the Sultans, it was also hoped that, if for one of many reasons the Federation collapsed, the FRA could take over the running of the country.

[510] Lord and Birtles (2011), p23.
[511] Ibid, p31.
[512] Interview with General Sir James Lunt on 10 July 1984, BFI/EE/T, Item 29.
[513] The Federal National Guard was itself a hybrid of two forces, the Government Guards and the Tribal Guards, which became known as FNG 1 and FNG 2. The former operated across the territory of the Federation, whilst the second were local forces based in the Sultanates and usually run by relatives of the Ruler. Unlike the FRA the FNG did not receive direct financial support from the British government, and whilst its commander was a British officer, all the other officers were Arab.

They failed to appreciate neither the extent to which it had been infiltrated nor the impact of tribal connections on its ranks. The officers and soldiers of the FRA would one day stand on parade as the band played "God Save the Queen", and the next they would be on leave with their tribes meeting their brothers and kinsmen who had joined the NLF. In many ways both the FRA and the NLF offered the same opportunity – a quick route out of abject poverty and backwardness. As Gavin says the NLF attracted the men most willing to fight and these were 'the more disinherited tribesmen of the hills, sons of the indebted ra'iyah cultivators, the lower ranks and the most recent recruits in the forces and the government service – the educationally backward and unskilled.'[514]

The level to which the FRA had been infiltrated was not fully appreciated by its British Military Command until very late. Lunt says, 'My Arab officers, who I talked to a great deal, were politically involved to a much greater extent than I realised, and certainly to a much greater extent than the colonial authorities in Aden realised'.[515] An incident provoked a spontaneous mutiny in the FRA in July 1967, and a bloodbath was avoided only by quick thinking on the part of some British officers and the use of informal tribal connections by their Arab counterparts[516]. The extent, to which the FRA had been, like so many other aspects of the Federation, a myth, became now all too evident. This dispelled a last cynical hope of achieving British objectives. For some time officials in Aden, as much as in Whitehall, had observed how in many colonies, after all the hullaballoo of independence had passed, reality set in, and force was what mattered. The coups in Nigeria, Ghana, many Francophone countries, and others had already shown this. Some hoped that by propping up the Federal Army, Britain's interests could be safeguarded, even if the Sultans and their government were swept away by popular will. The July mutiny proved that even that scenario was now

[514] Gavin, p 349.
[515] Lunt, interviewed on 10 July 1984, BFI-EE/T; Item 29.
[516] For a detailed account, see Ledger (1983); pp130-50.

unrealistic. It was then, and only then, that the British understood that they had run out of cards – there were none left to shuffle.

The end was not pleasant for the last officers who remained in the South Arabian Army. Major CPT Rebbeck wrote to Col H.B.H. Warring who had already left, on 16 October 1967:

> We totter on from day to day, our members steadily decline and there is less to do. We will be down to fifteen Officers on 1 November if all goes according to plan and we have less than 50 NCOs in station here now. We were given a holiday to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the struggle against the British last Saturday – a strange holiday for an Englishman to take! A dog in the Sergeant's Mess has died of suspected rabies, which is a bit worrying.[517]

[517] IWM WILL 09/53/1.

Chapter 5. Consensus lost and regained: the impact of party politics and special interests on policy and strategy towards South Arabia and the Gulf.

This chapter explores the extent to which there was political consensus in Britain on issues pertaining to Aden, South Arabia and the Persian Gulf in the period 1951-72, and the extent to which relations between the two main political parties - and individuals, groups, factions or organisations close to them – and the traditional and new elites in the region, coloured the decision-making process. The chapter also goes some way in evaluating the success or otherwise of the policies pursued by successive Conservative and Labour governments in this area.

5.1 Consensus in British foreign and colonial policy

WWII redefined the British polity in many ways. The scale and totality of the effort required to avert defeat; the realisation that victory was only possible with the help of others, and the social turmoil created by war shook British society from its roots, forever changing politics and how it was conducted. At home the Blitz, food shortages, the real danger of invasion, and the mass movement of big chunks of the population, blurred acute divisions between rich and poor, urban and rural, plebeian and patrician. The war narrowed political differences, and the situation demanded unity and consensus in the face of the enemy. Churchill's War Ministry was formed in May 1940 with the participation of Labour and Liberal ministers, and by 1942 the increasing importance of the Labour Party for the war effort saw its leader Clement Attlee being appointed as Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert

Morrison – another Labour Minister – headed the Home Office, and Ernest Bevin, the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, became Minister of Labour.[518] Labour Party ministers played a prominent role in dealing with domestic issues, whilst Churchill concentrated on the military and international dimension of the conflict. Indeed if there had been a German invasion in 1940, it was Churchill, Bevin and Lord Beaverbrook who were to form the committee of public safety to organise resistance.[519]

Whilst Labour had had short spells in government in the period between WWI and WWII, it was its participation in the WWII War Cabinet that assured its place within the British establishment. This had the double-edged consequence of ensuring that the system was irreversibly changed, whilst at the same time ensuring the system's ultimate durability. Whilst there were plenty of policy differences between Labour and the Conservatives, throughout the war and after, there was broad political consensus amongst the political elite, especially on issues such as foreign and imperial policy. After the war, both parties saw danger in increasing Soviet power and sought to keep the United States engaged in Europe through the NATO alliance. Both parties were also interested in promoting the idea of a reconstructed British empire, although the notion remained fuzzy, even if Churchill was persuaded to acquiesce to the independence of India in 1947, despite his considerable misgivings. The extent to which "consensus" was genuine has however exercised historians. Whilst the debate has focussed primarily on domestic politics, there is also much to be said

[518] Smith (1993), p44 says that coalition had forced the major parties to fill the ideological vacuum, produced by the fall of Chamberlain but adds that 'The democratic collectivist self-image associated with Keynes and Beveridge, Labour and Tory reformer, was to co-exist unhappily with the Churchillian legacy. If the people's war had been a fight for freedom through collectivism, Churchill's war had been a fight for freedom through individualism, and that difference of emphasis remained as a grumbling appendix even in the most obvious moments of post-war consensus. The central features of the post-war settlement only disguised what was finally an irreconcilable difference of opinion. The Churchill legacy also left the unfortunate impression that Britain still counted in the world, a delusion which affected Labour as much as Conservatives. The cost of the defence commitment which resulted, gnawed away at the nation's ability to develop the social services. This much was clear as early as five years after the end of the war when Nye Bevan resigned from Attlee's cabinet.'

[519] Hennessy;(1987), p29-30.

about its application in the realm of foreign and imperial/colonial policy.[520] Owen[521] suggests three different terms to define consensus in this field: 'policy settlement', 'partisan convergence' and 'popular contentment'. Since the last entails a broad agreement on issues by a wide set of people beyond the political elite, such an interpretation is not particularly useful in the context being discussed here, since, apart from a short moment in Aden in the very last stages of British rule which peaked with the foray of "Mad Mitch" into Crater in July 1967[522], the issue was never of much interest beyond a narrow circle. The first definition however is helpful, namely 'policy settlement consensus' as 'elite-level agreement among policy makers'. Owen further defines the elite as 'a group consisting of the core executive (Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants) which extends through the Colonial Office and other relevant departments to Governors and their advisers. Policy settlement is generally indicated by continuity of policy from one administration to the next.'[523] In an earlier important work, *The Road to 1945*, Paul Addison alternatively describes this as the 'Whitehall consensus'. In defining consensus as 'partisan convergence', Owen is more concerned with consensus within parties than between them. Agreements between the front benches are best seen as part of 'policy settlement' – as one front bench replaced another – whilst the debate within the wider parties was much more public and acrimonious, but in many ways less important.

Within the British establishment there was even disquiet that foreign and imperial policy had become a subject of interest to the wider public. Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, writing

[520] The tone of the debate, as focused almost exclusively on domestic policy, was set by Addison (1975). It was somewhat later that Foreign and Imperial/Colonial Policy was added in important contributions such as Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris, *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Thatcher* (1989). A collection of essays that challenges the "consensus" idea can be found in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (eds), *The myths of Consensus, New Views on British History 1945-64* (1996).

[521] Owen, (1996), pp158-9.

[522] In 1967, weeks before the British exit from Aden, Lt Col Colin Campbell Mitchell led the Argyll and Sutherlands into an unauthorised march into the township of Crater accompanied by fifteen bagpipes. They are often accused of using heavy handed tactics during the time they were in control of the district, but dubbed as "Mad Mitch" he became an instant hero with the British media.

[523] Owen; (1996) pp158-9.

after his retirement as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, warned against 'dangers attached to the pressure of an ill-informed public. Of these dangers the greatest is self-delusion. It is a fault to which as nation we are particularly prone.'[524] Cross-party consensus was useful since it helped contain the debate on foreign and imperial policy within certain bounds.

Political consensus also had to take into account important external factors. The opinion of the US government had to be factored in, even if not necessarily always followed. Similarly, there was sensitivity in both parties of the need to take into account the interests of big business when and where relevant. Thus on issues related to the Arabian Peninsula the opinion of big oil companies, such as BP and Shell, carried considerable weight. In some ways a somewhat watered down consensus involving these important players also developed.

In the decade after WWII ended, a general policy of moving the colonies towards self-government once they were ready for it, had the broad support of the political establishment, namely key persons in the civil service and the front bench of the two parties. This does not mean that there were not elements in both parties who were greatly dissatisfied, and opposed it for one reason or the other. The consensus on the broad line of policy also consisted of some caveats: – the strategic colonies could never aspire for full independence, and the colonies with large numbers of white settlers had to proceed to self-government on a different road map than those who had not. Whilst Suez may have broken consensus on imperial and foreign policy in many ways, the establishment was afraid of public volatility and engaged in 'efforts to insulate the electorate from the implications of colonial collapse.'[525] Owen however goes further, stating that:

> Like perhaps, its counterpart in domestic affairs, the "consensus" on the end of empire was therefore Janus-faced. Among the policy-making elite, it arose from a genuine recognition of the necessity to adapt Britain's colonial system to meet the

[524] Kirkpatrick (1959), p268.
[525] Owen in Jones and Kandiah (1996), p176.

> challenges of nationalism. Had it been possible to control the pace of concessions, it is likely that partisan dissent would have been confined to the political fringes. But the necessary, if largely unforeseen, acceleration in these plans required careful handling. For decolonisation to work to British advantage, policy now had to be pragmatic and flexible. It was vital (as the fate of the French Fourth Republic in its Algerian dealings reminded Party leaders) for it to be kept free from the paralysing effects of party strife. In their hands consensus was a device by which partisan divisions were to be bridged, and popular anxieties contained, or even concealed: less perhaps the happy product of a people's war than a highly successful exercise in the political management of discontent.[526]

Up to Suez, cross-party consensus on British foreign policy centred around three core ideas: the Atlantic Alliance with Britain and the US at its centre; the United Nations as a framework for resolving conflicts and crises; and the Commonwealth, as a means of retaining Britain's global posture and influence. Labour saw Suez as threatening all three. The Labour leadership had no time for Nasser, and Gaitskell who took over the leadership from Attlee in December 1955, referred to Nasser as a fascist dictator on several occasions. The Labour leader agreed that Nasser posed a danger to British vital interests in the Middle East, but felt that Nasser's actions, as distinct from his rhetoric, did not justify unilateral military action.

Eden, replaced Churchill as Prime Minister, in 1955, but as Foreign Secretary had been dealing with Egypt since 1951. He had banked on the assumption that once British troops were in harm's way, Labour would have no choice but to back the government. In fact, Labour had, at least on one occasion in 1952 by abstaining in a parliamentary vote, allowed the government to get its way on Suez despite a revolt on the Tory back benches. In 1956, however, Gaitskell had made it clear from the outset to Eden that Labour would only support an attack on Egypt if it was endorsed by the United Nations, or if Nasser took further action 'which amounted to obvious aggression by Egypt'. On 10 August 1956 Gaitskell wrote to Eden:

> Lest there should be any doubt in your mind about my personal attitude, let me say that I could not regard an armed attack on Egypt by ourselves and the French as

[526] Ibid pp176-7.

> justified by anything which Nasser has done so far or as consistent with the Charter of the United Nations. Nor, in my opinion, would such an attack be justified in order to impose a system of international control over the Canal - desirable though this is. If, of course, the whole matter were to be taken to the United Nations and if Egypt were to be condemned by them as aggressors, then, of course, the position would be different. And if further action which amounted to obvious aggression by Egypt were taken by Nasser, then again it would be different. So far what Nasser has done amounts to a threat, a grave threat to us and to others, which certainly cannot be ignored; but it is only a threat, not in my opinion justifying retaliation by war.[527]

This reinforced a statement that Gaitskell had made in the House of Commons on 2 August. When hostilities erupted Gaitskell asked for, and was given the right to address the nation. His speech hit hard at Eden and even called for his resignation. This resounded well with the public, but for many in the Conservative Party it was tantamount to treason. The Suez Crisis, and personal antipathy between Eden and Gaitskell put huge strain on the political consensus on foreign and imperial policy. Once it was broken it was not properly restored until the late 1960s, even if Macmillan made a point of regularly meeting with the Labour Party leadership to discuss policy, after he became Prime Minister.

David Goldsworthy has come to slightly different conclusions as to when consensus finished and started again in the realm of colonial policy in post-WWII Britain. He argues that consensus, what he calls the bi-partisan approach, lasted from 1945-51 and was followed by a period of conflict (1951-61), but was subsequently restored in 1961.[528] His argument, that consensus broke down as early as 1951, is primarily based on the assertive speeches of Labour MPs on colonial policy in Parliament after that year, and he further cites a letter by Arthur Creech-Jones, the former Labour Colonial Secretary, to *the Times* on 12 May 1955 in which he writes of 'real differences in conception…between the two parties.'[529] Goldsworthy says that some of this Labour hostility was due to the personality of the Colonial Secretary Lyttelton, as well as because of Labour's own internal divisions, with the leadership - not for

[527] Williams (1983), p575.
[528] Goldsworthy (1971).
[529] Goldsworthy (1971), pp206-7.

the last time - finding itself trying to appease a narrow but vocal radical element that was particularly active and important at party conferences. In its long period in opposition from 1951-64, the Labour Party did establish (or in some cases renew) contacts with many indigenous colonial leaders, and this greatly increased the ability of the party to speak authoritatively on such issues, leading to suggestions that it was even able to impact policy from opposition.[530] But Goldsworthy is right in arguing that such a claim is unfounded.

However, assuming one accepts the notion of consensus as being primarily – 'policy settlement consensus', as described by Owen, one can argue that the two front benches maintained a bi-partisan approach on most issues up to Suez, and it was Suez that broke the consensus, and front bench bi-partisanship was not properly restored until Heath took over the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1965, and even then somewhat slowly. However, the picture was far from black and white, because as Goldsworthy says the situation allowed many views to co-exist simultaneously particularly in the Conservative Party. This was awkward for a Party in government, and not without serious consequences, as this thesis argues. Indeed, in the 1950s the two parties had become broad churches, with centrist leaderships, around which various groups and individuals coalesced ranging from quasi-communists on the left of the Labour leadership, to hard right elements to the right of the Conservative leadership. The efforts of the leadership of both parties to appease their fringes, and the vocal utterings of those on the fringe themselves, increased perception of policy differences on foreign and imperial policy, although the position of the two front benches was often closer than it looked.

This ambiguity is well reflected in Macmillan's diary entries for the period when he was Prime Minister from 1957-63. Macmillan held dozens of meetings with Gaitskell and other opposition leaders, mainly to discuss foreign and colonial policy. Issues such as Cyprus,

[530] John Hratch,"The opposition's role in Colonial Policy", *The Listener* 25 April 1963 cited in Goldsworthy (1971), pp341-2.

Malta, and the Central African Federation featured prominently, as did various crises in the Middle East and the Far East. The meetings often, though not always, led to co-operation between the two front benches in handling difficult issues. After one such meeting, on 18 February 1958, Macmillan wrote, 'we do want to get as near as possible to a "bi partisan" foreign policy'.[531] However on this occasion, as with many others, Macmillan expressed frustrations at the Bevanites, and others on the left of the Labour Party that he clearly saw as subverting this effort. Macmillan was also very ambivalent on Gaitskell himself. 'He is not a big man', he wrote on 16 February 1959, after meeting him to discuss Cyprus and Germany[532]. A few weeks later, on 4 May, he described him as 'a contemptible creature – a cold-blooded, Wykehamist – intellectual and *embusque*'[533]; and later that year, on 17 December, he said, 'there are moments when his false, perjured face irritates me beyond measure'.[534] Underlying this contempt is the sense that Macmillan, like many other Conservatives, felt that Gaitskell had let the side down on Suez, and that he may himself be living to regret it, although there is also a clear understanding by Macmillan, reflected in many of the diary entries, that Gaitskell was having to walk a very tight rope to appease the left of his party.[535]

5.2 "Our friends" the Sultans, and "Our brothers" in ATUC

It was also around this time that cracks started appearing in the political consensus on British policy in Aden, South Arabia and the Persian Gulf. As discussed in Chapter 1, both parties broadly agreed that Britain had strategic interests in Aden, and economic and monetary interests in the Gulf. However, there were considerable differences of opinion both

[531]Catterall (2011), p95.
[532]Ibid, p194.
[533]Ibid, p216.
[534]Ibid, p261.
[535] The part of the diaries actually covering the Suez Crisis is missing. Macmillan told his biographer, that he had destroyed it at the request of Eden. (Horne, 1988, p438).

within and between the two front benches on how to secure these interests. These differences were further fuelled by personal contacts and friendships that cut across the formal networks. Until around 1955, there were hardly any contacts between politicians and public figures in London and Arab personalities in the region. From then onwards, contacts developed between the TUC and some Labour politicians, and trade unionists in Aden. This coincided with the time when, partly due to Trevaskis, the right wing of the Conservative Party started getting acquainted with the Sultans and Sheikhs that formed the ruling elite in South Arabia. For the left, 'brother Al-Asnag', and 'our brothers in ATUC' were now fraternal allies, whilst for the right, 'our friends the Sultans' assumed both a strategic significance and an emotional connection. These personal relations helped to define policy and build prejudices. They contributed to the difficulty of keeping a political consensus at a time of intense political rivalry.

This was also a time of great upheaval in British politics, a time when all the certainties of the past were being challenged. Suez had exposed how government decision-making remained archaic and hidden in obscurity; Macmillan's ministry was renowned for its nepotism and for its dependence on a tightly-knit group of Tory grandees. The Profumo scandal symbolised for many the decay of a political order that had exhausted itself, and was ripe for change. However when change came it was accompanied by uncertainty – the first Labour Government had a wafer-thin majority and expected not to be long-lasting. Once re-elected it was overshadowed by economic crisis, and there were whispers about how it could be removed from office before its time. This period of political unfreezing allowed personalities and special interests to exercise undue influence on events and on the decision-making process. A lot of focus has been put on the influence that the relationship of the TUC and the Labour's left, with counterparts in Aden, may have played on British policy. In fact, apart from providing some modest alternative sources of information on the situation on the

ground, these channels never determined policy. The same cannot be said about the Conservative right, whose position in the party was strong, and who, in and out of office, could rely on the support and information of the key present and former senior officials on the ground.

Two Tory grandees of the old school, Duncan Sandys and Julian Amery were actively engaged with the issues of South Arabia and the Gulf, even if this engagement took different trajectories. Sandys was a key protagonist in the decision-making process towards the region. In government, Macmillan saw Sandys as his attack dog. He was a Cabinet Minister to be deployed to solve problems: first as Minister of Defence to start a long overdue process of overhaul of the military, and of combining the Armed Forces into a unified command; and then as Minister of Aviation to deal with problems left by his predecessor (who Macmillan felt had 'failed to grasp the nettle'[536]). In 1960, he was sent to the Commonwealth Office to deal with the dominions in the awkward period when Britain was preparing to turn its back on them in favour of EEC membership. Finally, in 1962, he was sent to a combined Commonwealth and Colonial Office position to manage the end of empire. Macmillan thought very highly of Sandys, referring to him as '*gravissimus et ornatissimus*'[537]. He describes him as 'cool as a cucumber, methodical; very strong in character; has gradually mastered the art of Parl[iamentar]y speaking; tremendously hard working; not easily shaken from his course – ambitious and rather cruel (e.g. his treatment of his wife)'.[538] Not everybody was so laudatory. Gandy, the British Minister in Taiz, who had

[536] 18 October 1958, Catterall (2011), p252.

[537] 12 June 1961, Catterall (2011), p395. Catterall says that 'this probably a misquotation of Cicero's "*gravissimus vir et ornatissimus civis*", a most dignified man and excellent citizen', (fn 65 p395).

[538] 4 June 1961, Catterall (2011), p389. Sandys had just ditched his wife Diana, eldest daughter of Winston Churchill, to marry again. He was also caught in scandal when he was named in a divorce case as one of the lovers of the Duchess of Argyle.

to deal with him on the issue of recognising the republican government, describes him as 'an obstinate man' with 'a great gift of brow beating his colleagues'.[539]

Amery's engagement with the region and its issues was more personal, and to a point more passionate. He brought an interest in Arabia with him already when he was appointed Minister in 1957, and he maintained it subsequently in government and in opposition, regardless of whichever brief he was officially holding. Amery built a friendly relationship with many of the local leaders and personalities, which was very much driven by his quasi-crusading endeavour to seek to maintain Britain's primacy in the Middle East. This reached its climax in 1962 after the revolution in Yemen, when Amery used his personal contacts with King Hussein of Jordan and the Saudi royal family to build resistance to the new republican government. In 1963, Macmillan designated Amery, who was then Minister for Aviation, as Minister responsible for Yemeni affairs, overseeing a covert war that Britain launched against that country. This was an informal appointment. The cabinet was not informed, nor was the nation.[540]

It was Amery who put Trevaskis in touch again with Sandys after Trevaskis' dismissal from Aden, although of course the two had known each other at least since 1957[541], but their relationship up to this point had been that between a senior Minister and a trusted official. The Trevaskis/Sandys relationship was always formal, whilst the Trevaskis/Amery relationship was much more personal, based on friendship and loyalty. Trevaskis always addressed his letters to Sandys as 'Dear Mr Sandys', until as late as 1966, whilst those to

[539] Gandy (1998), p265.

[540] Bower (1995), p 249, based on an interview with Amery. Bower's biography of Sir Dick White, long-time head of MI5 and MI6 offers unique insights on the work of the intelligence Services. It is based on interviews that Bowen conducted with White, other senior intelligence officers, as well as personalities such as Amery. Bowen also inherited the notes and manuscript of Andrew Boyle who was also working on a biography of White but had died before being able to finish it. Bower's book 'The perfect English spy' is not however without controversy. For a critical discussion of the book highlighting some of its weaknesses see Davies (1997).

[541] Sandys, met Trevaskis when he visited the WAP in 1957. There are no records of other meetings before that.

Amery were always to 'My dear Julian' (except for some early ones that were addressed 'My dear Amery').[542]

5.3 The Conservatives and the empire's last hurrah

Winston Churchill may famously have said that he had not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire[543], yet the Conservative Party, in office from 1951-64, did just that. The process was one that pained many Conservatives, and far from being smooth and evenly consistent it was often erratic, reflecting differences within the Party. Goldsworthy says the Churchill and Eden ministries did not seek to accelerate the process of change in colonial policy that had been initiated during the post-WWII Labour government, adding however that from 1957-64, and especially after 1959, the Macmillan and Douglas-Home governments hastened the end of formal empire with a flurry of decolonisations.[544] But not in Arabia.

The 1954 decision to withdraw from the Suez Base unleashed within the ranks of the Conservative Party a big debate about Britain's role in the world, a debate that some say continues today. On the vanguard of the hawks was "the Suez group", an influential group of Conservative backbench MPs[545], established in 1952 by Julian Amery and Charles Waterhouse with the support of Fitzroy Maclean and Enoch Powell to oppose any agreement with Nasser that would weaken the British presence in Egypt. Amery was the group's co-secretary (together with Powell) and he became a kind of de facto leader of the group, not by seniority but because of his father's house, 112 Eaton Square, (which he inherited on his

[542] This is based on dozens of letters between Trevaskis and the two politicians in the archives of all three.

[543] Mansion House Speech, 12 November 1942.

[544] Goldsworthy (1990), p81.

[545] The view that the Suez group were somehow embittered ex-Ministers and ambitious young men on the fringe of the party is dismissed by Onslow (1997), p117, who argues that many of its members held very key and important positions within the Conservative Party.

father's death in 1955), and which served as a meeting place for the group[546]. Here Amery also regularly hosted leaders from the Gulf and South Arabia to the extent that it was often described as 'an alternative Foreign Office, to which a never-ending procession of kings, oriental potentates, East European presidents, guerrilla fighters and intelligence officers from around the world would beat a path. So too did many contemporary British politicians.'[547]

Another high profile member of the group was Billy McLean[548], a colourful Conservative MP (Member for Inverness from 1954-64), who was the group's action man, and who became heavily embroiled in Adeni and Yemeni affairs in the 1960s. Like Trevaskis, McLean was a friend of Amery from his school days at Eton, and of Trevaskis whom he met during WWII in Eritrea. During the war, Amery, McLean and a handful of others helped organise Albanian resistance to Italian occupation. Amery and McLean were to remain an inseparable team, each complementing the other in skills, connections and outlook. Both McLean and Amery were reportedly also members of the *Cercle Pinay*[549].

The Suez Group did not include Ministers, but there were many in the cabinet that were supportive, including Churchill himself. 'More than once Amery passed the Prime Minister in the House of Commons to be urged by Churchill, "Keep up the good work"'.[550] However, in public, Churchill backed his Foreign Secretary who was caught between a rock

[546] According to Fielding (1990) 'The Amery House in Eaton square was a Suez Group bastion. The Macmillan House in Smith square was another', p105.

[547] Faber (2005), p533.

[548] McLean was a war hero, with a distinguished record as an operative of the SOE. In the ODNB Roderick Bailey describes McLean as 'calm and considered in thought and deed, even in moments of gravest danger, and his charm, kindness, and humour endeared him to his many friends'. McLean's friend and biographer Xan Fielding says that 'Like many Celts he was subject to violent shifts of mood, ranging from euphoria to mild melancholy', Fielding (1990), p100. Fielding says that in September 1955, Mclean had a nervous breakdown, during which he hallucinated that freemasons and Scottish nationalists were going to crucify him, and he even pointed to the hill where it was to be done. He was diagnosed by a psychiatrist as being in 'a paranoid state induced by alcohol'. After being put in a nursing home for several weeks he was declared fully recovered, apparently after reading all eight volumes of Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire', and by the following February he was back in parliament speaking about Nasser and Middle East politics. (Fielding, 1990, pp100-101).

[549] Bailey, ODNB. *Le Cercle* was established by former French Prime Minister Antoine Pinay and French intelligence agent Jean Violet under the name *Cercle Pinay.* The group shuns publicity but is reported to meet annually near Washington DC. The current Chairman of the *Cercle* is reported to be Norman Lamont.

[550] Amery, quoted by Scott Lucas, (1991), p28.

and a hard place – the influential right wing of his party, and the position of the US government, which was, initially at least, ready to co-exist with Nasser.

In 1956, Nasser, by nationalising the canal and seeing off the Anglo-French (and Israeli) invasion, humiliated Britain. Many in the Conservative Party were set on seeking revenge.

In 1957, some members of the Suez Group were promoted to Government when Macmillan replaced Eden as Prime Minister, including Julian Amery who was made Parliamentary Under Secretary for War. The Suez Group faded away but the key individuals concerned remained very much in touch with each other, and interested in Britain's presence in the Middle East. They constituted an important force within the Conservative Government and Party, and remained so until Heath assumed the leadership in 1965. It is this group, with its direct and personal contact with Trevaskis and his people in Aden, and with its personal acquaintances and sympathies and antipathies with local leaders in the region, that often exerted decisive influence on British policy toward Aden, South Arabia, Yemen, Oman and the rest of the Gulf. Their importance far exceeds any influence that trade unionists or anti-colonialist activists ever had on the leadership of the Labour Party and Government, let alone the British establishment. Their influence peaked in the period 1962-64 when Sandys and Amery held important government positions, then declined sharply with the election of Heath as leader of the Conservative Party on 27 July 1965. When Heath formed his team after his leadership victory, Amery and Sandys were dropped from the front bench, and neither of them was offered a Cabinet post after the 1970 election victory, although Amery did hold the position of Minister of State.

Suez catapulted Arab politics to the front-line of British foreign policy and the debate on Britain's place in the world. For more than a decade thereafter, events in places like Aden, Muscat and Bahrain, which previously had hardly exercised British Ministers, let alone the

British public, now all of a sudden assumed an inflated importance. Three successive British Conservative Prime Ministers, Eden, Macmillan and Douglas-Home oversaw a process of mission creep in Arabia that perplexed observers at the time, and continues to do so till the present. This process did not go on unchallenged, but a combination of circumstances strengthened the hand of the hardliners.

5.4 The debate within the Cabinet system, during the Macmillan and Douglas-Home Premierships.

During the post-WWII Labour Government a three pillar strategy on defence had emerged, based on defence of the British mainland, maintaining vital sea communications, and securing the Middle East as a defensive and striking base against the Soviet Union.[551] This strategy assumed a dependence on a US nuclear deterrent and this remained the case even after Britain had developed its own independent nuclear capability. The first proper defence review after WWII was conducted by Duncan Sandys, as Minister of Defence, in 1957[552]. This was the first of a series of papers that exposed a contradiction in Conservative policy, for whilst admitting the need to adapt defence policy to the economic capacity of the country, at the same time it sought to maintain Britain as a global power, with the defence posture that that required.[553] This was at a time when defence spending was around 10% of GNP and 7% of the population was in uniform[554], a situation that was considered unsustainable in peacetime. The Sandys Paper is also important because it raised two other key issues that continued to dominate debate for a long time. It weighed in favour of nuclear capability against conventional forces, and it supported the use of aircraft carriers, as distinct from land bases, as a means of power projection. Since the debate on these two issues lasted

[551] Taylor (2010), p3.

[552] *Defence: Outline of future policy*, Cm 124, April 1957. There were also two independent defence reviews into the 'Central Organisation of Defence', one in 1958 (Cm476) and one in 1963 (Cm2097).

[553] For a full discussion see Dorman, *Crises Reviews in British Defence Policy*, in Croft et al (2001).

[554] Taylor (2010), pp3- 4.

several decades, one can see the Sandys paper as opening the debate rather than resolving it. The muddle created contradictions and arguments on imperial policy within government, reflected more starkly in discussions on the Middle East. The arena where differences played out was the Cabinet Committee system, an intricate web of committees and sub committees of Ministers and officials that has existed from the eighteenth century but that since WWII emerged as a key component of British government practice. The system was considerably developed and refined by the post-WWII Labour Government of Attlee.[555] However, under the Conservative Governments of 1951-64 the system showed serious signs of malfunction. J.M. Finlayson's analysis of the system in this period concludes that 'it did not function as intended, and that its actual functioning had a damaging impact on the development of policy'. He argues the system 'generated a lot of unproductive activity', 'helped produce policy drift', suffered from 'bureaucratic inertia' and 'failed to co-ordinate policy'.[556] Government policy towards Aden, South Arabia and the Gulf co-ordinated and generated through this system suffered accordingly. The fact that two different government departments had responsibilities for Aden and South Arabia, and for the Gulf, exacerbated the problem, but was not the main factor.[557]

This thesis has already argued that Aden constituted a flagrant case of mission creep in British policy. Whilst this can be proven through episodic events on the ground, a more thoroughly documented proof lies in a review of the Cabinet archive and the work of the Cabinet Committees. Finlayson analysed the Cabinet Committee system engagement with Aden and South Arabia, and by extension with the Gulf in this period. He says that in 1954, Aden (including the protectorates) had not been the subject of discussion in Cabinet

[555] Possibly as many as 466 committees, including standing committees, ad hoc committees and others were created in this period according to Hennessey and Arends (1983), p9.

[556] Finlayson (2002), p17.

[557] Manroe (1964), p72. There had it seems been much more confusion between the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office, before they were eventually put under one political master in 1962, particularly with regard to the Central African Federation. Macmillan described it as ' case of "left hand, right hand" and one not knowing what the other is doing'. (Diaries, 27 February 1960 Catterall (2011), p275).

committees at all, but was discussed twice in the Cabinet in connection with Yemeni incursions in the protectorates. [558] A year later the Cabinet authorised a one-off expenditure of £76,000 for strengthening the administration of the WAP[559]. This can be seen as the first result of the lobbying by Trevaskis and his interventionist policies. It was the beginning of a very costly relationship. From this point onwards, Aden also became an issue that 'was discussed frequently by a number of committees, and was also one of the most frequently discussed topics in the Cabinet'.[560]

In the same year, the Foreign Office recommended to the Cabinet that a gift of 'motor transport', (estimated cost £25,000) be made to the Sultan of Muscat to enable him to improve the security of his new oil installations.[561] Once more this modest decision was the precursor of a much more substantial engagement over the subsequent two decades. In 1958, Amery, in his first Ministerial role, negotiated an agreement with the Sultan of Muscat and Oman that continued to define Britain's relationship with that country for many years later.

The 1958 Defence White Paper[562] recognised Aden as a strategic asset for the first time and named it as headquarters of a new integrated military command, catering for the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. This was carved out of Middle East Command in Cyprus, although it confidently said this would require 'only a slight increase in the staff of the existing headquarters in Aden'.[563] By the time of the 1961 paper, Aden had become one of two unified commands outside Europe, designated from 1 March of that year as Middle East Command (whilst Cyprus was renamed Near East command). [564]Discussions on Aden

[558] Finlayson (2002), pp99-127.

[559] CAB 128, CM (55) 17th 23 June 1955. Finlayson incorrectly cites this figure as £760,000 rather than £76,000.

[560] Finlayson (2002), p99.

[561] CAB 129/78 "Memorandum by the Middle East Oil Committee" 14 November 1955.

[562] From 1946 an annual Statement on Defence (later known as Statement on Defence Estimates) either in addition to or combined with the annual defence estimates was issued. These came to be commonly referred to as Defence White Papers. (Taylor, 2010, p2).

[563] Defence, Britain's Contribution to Security, CMND, February 1958.

[564] Report on Defence 1961, CMND February 1961.

and the Protectorates from 1958 onwards therefore inevitably followed the logic that Aden was essential for Britain's defence, and retaining a strong British position in the protectorate was essential for the defence of Aden. By 1962, Yemen was added to this equation, namely that a hostile (i.e. Nasserist) regime in Yemen was a threat to both Aden and the Protectorate, and therefore to Britain. This argument was used to justify a steady increase in expenditure, and in discussions on all aspects of constitutional change in both Aden and the protectorates, as well as in justifying direct British interventions, such as the deposition of the Sultan of Lahej, and later to support covert operations in Yemen. This narrow and often unchallenged approach became more distinct once Sandys became the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Instead of assuming the usual role that the Colonial Office traditionally played in Cabinet when discussing Colonial issues, namely standing up for the Colony under discussion and its interests, and usually supporting measures that would lead towards greater measures of self-rule[565], Sandys was 'more concerned with broader British interests, and clearly saw constitutional advance not as an end in itself, but as a means by which Britain could retain the base'.[566]

The Cabinet however, was far from united in its outlook. There were two sets of differences. The first was between those who argued that Aden was vital for defence, and those who thought that the cost of keeping the base, both financial and political, was higher than the economic and political interests it was supposed to be protecting.[567] On 9 February 1963, in a Defence Committee discussion, it was argued that the economic rationale behind saying that Aden was important because Britain needed to protect its oil interests was flawed since it was possible that the earnings from Britain's interests in the area were actually less than the cost of maintaining forces there. The oil exporting countries would still need to sell

[565] Goldsworthy (1990), p86, argues that this was the case with both Oliver Lyttelton and Alan Lennox Boyd, despite the fact that both were also on the right of the Conservative Party.

[566] Finlayson (2002), p122.

[567] Ibid, p116.

their oil, of which there was surplus production, whether or not Britain still has the Aden base.[568] Although history was to prove this argument right, at the time this was very much a minority opinion, and the matter was left to further study. As Finlayson argues this was a useful and often used way of not taking a decision.

The second more significant set of differences was about how that base could be secured for as long as possible in the face of increased opposition and the wave of nationalism that was gripping the region. From 1958 to 1964 the Conservative Cabinet swayed to and fro between one variant or other during lengthy discussions in Cabinet and Cabinet committees, often without any decision being taken.[569] Between the small minority view that Aden could be abandoned because it was not useful, and others who preferred to just hold on to the status quo, the Cabinet toyed with a number of options. These ranged from retaining sovereignty over the whole, or part, of the Colony of Aden, whilst federating the states of the interior and moving them to independence, to merging Aden with the Federation, and securing the base through treaty. The dozen or so different options all had to deal with some stark realities. The base was meshed into the colony, and neatly excising it would require that at least half of the territory of the Colony would be removed, and even that would still leave it vulnerably dependent on labour and resources. There was also the issue of how to merge cosmopolitan Aden into a backward federation against its own will, and a constant reference to the fact that the base existed in the face of strong opposition from Arab nationalism. The Cabinet and its Committees debated the issue at a leisurely pace between 1957-62 without taking any final decision – except to give a nod for the federation to be constructed. This decision seems to have been taken purely on the basis of the information being provided by Trevaskis and the Aden Secretariat, and there was no interest to dig deeply into the implications.

[568] Ibid, citing CAB 131/28 D(63) 3rd.
[569] For an excellent summary see Finlayson (2002) pp99-127.

All options required a considerable financial outlay because the goodwill of the newly found Arab 'friends' had to be bought, and there was constant haggling with the Treasury. In the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees, the Treasury Ministers often reserved their position till later. Conveniently, "later" often never came because the Cabinet hopped from one option to another long before the Treasury could catch up with costing. In fact, procrastination had become a policy in itself. On 5 May 1961, the Defence Minister, Harold Watkinson, told the Colonial Policy Committee, in a discussion on the future constitution of Aden, he would 'prefer no changes, but if this was not possible he would like the rate of constitutional advance to be as slow as possible.'[570] One reason was that the Defence Ministry wanted to start a massive building program for the newly arrived soldiers to be housed. This program was not expected to finish until 1964, but the Cabinet was told that 'any assumptions about the length of time during which we could expect security of tenure for British military establishments in the Arabian Peninsula were at best conjectural'[571]. Some queried the financial sense of spending £14.20 million[572] on buildings that were to be ready in 1964 but which most likely had to be vacated by 1970 at best, but the MOD persisted and a decision was finally taken to go ahead with the construction.

Things changed when Sandys added Colonial affairs to his portfolio in July 1962. With his usual single mindedness, Sandys set about trying to address the issues. Within days of his appointment he summarised the choice to Cabinet as follows, ' …to retain, on the analogy of the sovereign base areas in Cyprus, British sovereignty over those limited areas of the colony in which our defence installations were concentrated. The second would be to rely on a defence treaty with an independent federation or to introduce some form of words

[570] Finlayson (2002) p110 quoting CAB 134/1560 CPC (61) 5th.
[571] CAB 132/27 Minutes of the Defence Committee held on 16 May 1962.
[572] CAB 132/27 27 Document D (62) 30 Memorandum by the Minister of Defence on "The Services Building Programme in the Middle East Command", 1 June 1962.

recognising the continuing interest of the United Kingdom in the defence installations.'[573] Both options were now based on the assumption that Aden was going to be forced into merger with the Federation against the will of its people. Sandys told the Cabinet in stark terms:

> … a majority of the population of the Colony was opposed to the merger. The fact that it commanded support in the Aden legislature was due to the fact that the elections had been held on a limited franchise, and had been widely boycotted on that account even by those entitled to vote. It must therefore be assumed that the merger would lead to unrest, and possibly to disorder, which would have serious political repercussions in this country and in the United Nations. Nevertheless, the government had now before them a request from the Aden Legislature that the merger should proceed and it had long since been decided that this would best serve not only the interests of this country, but the interests of the population of Aden Colony itself and of the territories of the federation. While he considered that the merger should go forward, he thought it right to warn the cabinet that this might lead to serious political difficulties.[574]

Neither caring about breaking the political consensus in Britain, nor about alienating the international community, the Cabinet decided to move ahead with the merger regardless, but again failed to take a decision on the choice between 'sovereign base' or 'defence treaty', since the Minister of Defence once more queried the viability of the 'Cyprus' arrangement in the different circumstances of Aden, adding for good measure that he thought that a sovereign base would also make the merger talks ahead even more difficult.[575]

There has been some attempt in the literature to present these differences of opinion as a split between a progressive Colonial Government in Aden that wanted to push Colony and Protectorate towards independence, and a reactionary response from London. Trevaskis makes this point with regard to his own policy and Balfour-Paul with regards to Luce's.[576] But as Mawby says in his excellently documented account of the process, 'the independence envisaged for the region by Trevaskis and Luce was to be heavily circumscribed. Their

[573] CAB 128/36 CC (62) 52nd 1 August 1962.
[574] CAB 128/36, CC (62) 52nd, 1 August 1962.
[575] Ibid.
[576] Balfour-Paul (1991), p70.

concern was not with self-determination for the local population but with the installation of British allies as guarantors of British influence. Indeed in order to achieve a merger of Aden and the federation, the notion of consent was abandoned precisely because the policies pursued by British administrators were so unpopular in Aden. Independence was a matter of pragmatic adjustment from formal to informal empire and its rationale was that only the latter could ensure continued British influence and confound nationalist opposition.'[577]

In the summer of 1962, Sandys initiated the complicated process of merging Aden into the South Arabian Federation. There were first talks in London with those designated as representatives of both Colony and Federation, followed by the tense debate in the Aden Legislative Council in September. The merger proposal was then discussed in the British Parliament in November 1962, where, unusually on Colonial issues, there was disagreement between the front benches. Labour's attack was led by Denis Healey and focused mainly on the lack of legitimacy of the LegCo. Healey said that the members of the LegCo had only received 5,000 votes when they were elected, and this in a territory with a population of 220,000. Labour proposed an amendment that fresh elections with an expanded franchise should be held before merger. The Junior Minister in the Colonial Office, Nigel Fisher, dismissed the criticism on the franchise: 'At the time of the last election the true Adenese population was only 100,000, because one must deduct the 80,000 transient Yemeni workers…..and also all the women, because they do not have a right to vote as in many Arab countries, and of course the children too. That means that about 30,000 adult males, of whom about 21,500 were entitled to vote; 26% of those voted, which is much the same percentage

[577] Mawby (2005), p65. Mawby speaks of 'strong opposition' by Sandys and Amery to the idea of merger. This seems to be a misreading of the situation. Amery and Sandys, as the architects of the Cyprus agreement of the sovereign bases, had become supporters of this model, but they did not see it as being in contradiction to the necessity of merger, but rather, as did Trevaskis, as a way of consolidating the Federation, the basis on which any deal would depend. It was the military, with an eye on the more practical issues, that constantly questioned the 'merger plus sovereign bases' idea, and who saw the status quo (colony) as by far the best option.

as usually vote in a local election in my constituency'.[578] Thus, having reassured itself that there was as much representative government in Aden as there was in Surbiton[579], the House of Commons approved the merger after a division with 253 in favour and 181 against. On January 18, 1963 Aden became the twelfth member of the South Arabia Federation.

Away from partisan politics, a Colonial Office memorandum in 1963 stated clearly that 'the aim of constitutional development in recent years in both Aden State and Aden protectorate was to secure the use of Aden at least until 1970, and that the only way of ensuring this, short of using military force, was to foster an alliance between the moderates in Aden and the traditional rulers in the WAP'.[580]

5.5 Adventures in the Yemen

Another important divergence on policy within the Conservative Government was the decision not to recognise the new republican government in Yemen after the revolution there on 26 September 1962. This story has long been shrouded in secrecy and disinformation, but the picture can now be constructed more clearly.

Immediately after the 1962 coup, two schools of thought emerged: one was to immediately recognise the new government, and get as close to it as possible in order to be able to influence its policies; the other was to withhold recognition and thus not only weaken its legitimacy but also make it more vulnerable to attack. Whilst the debate was initially going on within departments as much as between them, eventually the Foreign Office[581], prompted by its Legation in Taiz, which supported recognition from the outset[582], veered towards recognition. The Colonial Office, prompted by Aden, was consistently against it from the start. The matter was discussed in Cabinet on numerous occasions between October

[578] Hansard, 13 November 1962.
[579] Fisher's constituency in Surrey.
[580] CAB 134/2278, OC(O)(63)33, 20 August 1963.
[581] For a sense of the debate in the FO see Gandy (1998), p253.
[582] Gandy (1998), p256.

1962 and February 1963, before being settled by default when the Yemeni Government expelled the British Legation due to non-recognition.

On the first occasion when the matter was raised in Cabinet, on 9 October 1962, the Prime Minister made it clear that what was at stake was Aden, which, if it was lost, would endanger the whole British position in the Persian Gulf. The Cabinet decided on 'a policy of non-involvement' and to delay recognition.[583] At the next meeting, on 15 October, Sandys weighed in on the discussion reporting that the rulers of the federation 'were much disturbed' at events.[584] On 28 October, the Cabinet decided to recognise the Republican Government[585], but 'to have discussions with the rulers of the pro-British territories in the Persian Gulf and of the Aden Protectorate in order to prepare the way for early recognition'.[586] However, on 6 November, the Cabinet discussed the issue again. Macmillan told his Ministers that the situation was 'delicate and difficult'. He added 'it was probable that on balance it would be necessary to recognise the new regime before very long, but there was a strong case for deferring recognition, at least until after the Parliamentary debate on the merger between the Aden colony and the Aden protectorate which was due to take place on 13 November'.[587] On 8 November, the Cabinet heard that the US may be moving towards recognition and at Sandys' insistence that this 'could have the gravest consequences for Aden', agreed to consider what further representations could be made to the US government.[588] On 27 November, Cabinet was told that the US was now likely to proceed with recognition of the new government that now seemed well entrenched. However, the Foreign Secretary added: 'Our own position was still complicated by the probability that recognition of the republican

[583] CAB/128/36; CC (62) 59th.
[584] CAB 128/36; CC (62) 60th.
[585] Macmillan had discussed the matter with Governor Johnston on 22 October, at which meeting the Governor conceded that recognition was inevitable, but pleaded for a week's delay, to which Macmillan agreed. (Diaries, 22 October 1962, Catterall (2011) p509).
[586] CAB 128/36; CC (62) 61st.
[587] CAB 128/36; CC (62) 66th.
[588] CAB/128/36 CC (62) 68th.

regime in the Yemen would have a seriously depressing effect on the morale of our supporters in Aden Colony and the Aden protectorate'.[589] By the time of the meeting of 6 December, the split between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office became starker. Sandys, who was just back from Aden, was now much more assertive. He argued that 'it would be far better to lose diplomatic representation in the Yemen than to weaken in any way our supporters in Aden and our power to maintain vital defence interests'.[590] Difference of opinion was now considered so serious[591] that the Prime Minister instructed the Cabinet Office to prepare a paper setting out the issues that needed to be taken into consideration before a decision could be taken. This was duly circulated by the Cabinet Secretary on 10 January 1963.[592] Things were, however, overtaken by events, for on 14 February, the Foreign Secretary informed the Cabinet that the British Legation had been expelled from Taiz as a result of the delay in recognition. He added, 'it would not now be possible to recognise the republican regime, at least in the short term. He regretted this result, although he accepted the force of the argument that recognition at this stage would have been liable to have serious reactions in Aden'. The government was left only with a choice of how to explain its position, and it was agreed that 'it should be justified by reference to the fact that the regime was not in effective control of the whole country which it purported to govern and was dependant on military support from Egypt.'[593] Macmillan wrote in his diary, 'The F.O. and F.S. are rather upset. The Col. Secy is triumphant – so is M of Defence'[594].

However behind all the formal diplomatic and bureaucratic niceties a cruder exercise in political manipulation was in hand. It seems that the 'resistance' of the Federal Rulers to recognise the Republican regime had been fabricated, or at least much inflated by Trevaskis.

[589] CAB 128/36 CC (62) 71st
[590] CAB 128/36 CC (62) 73rd
[591] Macmillan described it as 'a violent division of opinion', (28 January 1963, Catterall, 2011, p538).
[592] CAB 129/112 C(63) 3 "Note on the Yemen".
[593] CAB 128/37 CC (63) 11th.
[594] 14 February 1963, Catterall, (2011), p541.

Astonishingly (or perhaps not, given what has already been established in the previous chapters), the head of the British Legation in Yemen, Christopher Gandy, was much later to write: 'I was informed by a senior British official in the administration (Alistair Macintosh), a majority of the federal rulers at first wanted us to recognise the Republic; it needed vigorous intervention by Trevaskis to persuade them otherwise.'[595] Gandy is also in no doubt that the main force behind the intransigence of Aden was Trevaskis rather than Governor Johnston.[596] The Foreign Office at this time also became convinced that Aden was spicing up the views of the Federal Rulers. The Foreign Office mandarin Harold Caccia accused the Aden High Commission of 'toughening up their account of the views of the federal Ministers'.[597]

In relation to the issue of Yemen, however, there is a parallel story. For years the British narrative has been that the Nasser-backed Republican Government, was a threat to Aden and the Protectorate. The story of British involvement in the civil war in Yemen emerged in bits and pieces over the years through narratives of mercenaries and others involved. It is not the purpose of this thesis to enter into detail about aspects of these operations, but the way they started is an issue pertinent to the main thrust of this thesis' arguments.

The obsession with Aden and the paranoia of Nasser at the heart of government reached critical levels after the republican coup in Yemen. Macmillan wrote: 'During the month of October 1962, in spite of more immediate dangers elsewhere, I felt gravely concerned about our position in Aden. On 5 and 6 October urgent meetings took place with my colleagues in charge of the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. We agreed to prepare defensive measures in case Aden or the protectorates were openly attacked, and meanwhile to take such other action as might seem justifiable.'[598] The

[595] Gandy (1998), p257.
[596] Gandy (1998), p262.
[597] Caccia to Johnston, 22 February 1963, quoted by Gandy (1968), p273.
[598] Macmillan (1973), p267.

Prime Minister even wrote to the Queen on 7 October to warn her of the seriousness of the situation.[599]

Macmillan wrote in his diary 'All the afternoon and evening on the situation in Yemen, wh[ich] is developing very badly for us. If the new revolutionary Govt is established, the pressure on the Aden protectorate, and then on the Aden Colony and base will be very dangerous.'[600]

Kennedy Trevaskis was in London on this day. It is not clear if he was present at the meeting with the Prime Minister. Even if not, he would surely have been closely consulted[601]. We can deduce the outcome of the meetings from a secret telegram sent at the end of the day by Sandys to Johnston, with instructions on future action:[602] In it Sandys says that the Government had 'decided to give all reasonable support to Hassan, in so far as this can be done without undue risk of open involvement'. He put Johnson in charge of the operation, assisted by Trevaskis, but warned him that, 'before taking any action which is likely to be traceable to HMG, you should seek authority from me.' Johnson was authorised 'immediately to make available to Hassan's son such money at your disposal as you may think necessary (not exceeding £50,000) together with as many rifles (not exceeding 5,000) and ammunition as you may consider he can usefully distribute. It will be for you to decide whether the money and arms should be issued all together or in instalments. The money and the supplies were to be 'obtained through the friends'[603]. Johnson was also told, 'we may decide to establish as soon as possible a secret representative with radio equipment alongside

[599] Ibid, p268
[600] 5 October 1962, Catterall (2011), p503.
[601] Bower (1996) quoting an unattributable SIS source says that a critical meeting that decided the issue 'was on the playing fields of the Dragon School at Oxford. The Minister (Amery) met Kennedy Trevaskis and agreed that the Royalists should be supported against Nasser. "It's the last fling of the Arab Idealists", White [the head of the SIS] was told. p248. Bower or his source may have got the school wrong. It is much more likely that Amery and Trevaskis would have been attending an event at their own old school, Summer Fields.
[602] Sandys to Johnston, 5 October 1962, TREV I/5/9.
[603] A reference to MI6.

Prince Hassan senior in order to obtain reliable and continuous information about the situation'.

This document is important since from it one can conclude that, (a) It was the British side who initiated aggressive activity within days of the revolution, and long before that revolution could make any hostile acts towards colony or protectorate; (b) That covert operations were authorised prior to the matter being discussed by Cabinet; (c) That the Cabinet decision of 9 October 1962 that Britain would adopt a posture of non-involvement did not reflect the reality; (d) that the operation was to be tightly controlled by Sandys personally, through Governor Johnston and implemented through Trevaskis, thus leaving no ambiguity as to the political control of the operation and the chain of command.

Within days of the Sandys cable, Neil McLean appeared on the scene, having arrived in Aden sometime around 23 October, after having visited King Hussein in Amman and King Saud in Saudi Arabia. According to McLean's biographer from there he entered Yemen. 'The most suitable approach was through Beihan, one of the numerous little emirates and sultanates belonging to the Federation of South Arabia, then under British protection. Sherif Hussein, Minister of the Interior of the Federation, provided two Landrovers, an armed escort and an interpreter; and on 27 October, Billy reached Harib…'.[604] Thus started one of the longest and most extensive covert British military operations after WWII. Leaving Yemen after three days, McLean went to Saudi Arabia from where he 'sent a telegram to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, strongly advising the government not to recognise Sallal, at least until he could stand on his own two feet without having to rely on Egyptian troops and aeroplanes to keep him in power'.[605] Although it is very unlikely that the second part of the sentence was in the telegram, since this was the reason crafted much later to explain British non-recognition, McLean's intervention explains why the Cabinet first had decided to recognise

[604] Fielding (1990), p132.
[605] Fielding (1990), p133.

the republican regime after some days, but why Macmillan subsequently played for time and eventually weighed in on the side of those who did not want to recognise it. In November, McLean again entered Yemen and this time met the Imam himself, and shortly after 'on the strength of Billy's report several million pounds worth of light weapons had been secretly flown from an RAF station in Wiltshire for onward transportation to the Yemeni Royalists via Beihan. This operation was not repeated, but Beihan remained open for Saudi financed convoys and also for Western mercenaries.'[606] Indeed, once it became clear that Sallal's government was much more well entrenched than McLean had initially suggested, there appears to have been a reluctance on the part of the British government to continue financing this costly operation, and the operation took the form of a mercenary operation, funded by the Saudis, with the British providing tacit support such as transit arrangements through Aden and the federation, and communications support.

In assessing the work of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees in the period 1951-64, with respect to Aden and South Arabia, a number of issues emerge: (a) The influence of the Colonial Office on the Cabinet Committee system peaked in 1963, despite the fact that by this time most of the colonies had gone.[607] This was most likely the result of the strong personality of Duncan Sandys. Whilst traditionally when discussions on decolonisation issues were taking place the Colonial Office not only took the lead, but also ensured that the general interests and welfare of the territory under discussion were considered, however, on Aden the voice of the Colonial Office appears muffled. The Colonial Office position in the Cabinet Committees was more concerned with strategic considerations than with the welfare of colony and protectorates in its care.[608] (b) The Cabinet based its decisions on Aden on incomplete, inaccurate or distorted information. As has already been discussed, Trevaskis

[606] Fielding (1990), p140.
[607] Finlayson (2002), p55.
[608] Finlayson (2002), p 122.

policy was to monopolise, and if convenient distort, information coming out of WAP/Federation. MI5, the agency responsible for intelligence in the colonies, had not been encouraged to work in the region, with Trevaskis insisting that he had all the intelligence needed, and arguing instead for a focus on *keeny meeny* tactics. At the start of the "Emergency", some steps were taken to establish an intelligence organisation in the Federation, but the military accused the Colonial Office of procrastination. In 1964 - after a discussion of the issue at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff with the Commander in Chief Middle East, the situation was summed up by Lord Mountbatten, the Chief of the Defence Staff,

> '…the Chiefs of Staff were concerned at the slow progress in the important matter of improving the intelligence service in Aden and the Federation. The re-organisation of the control, gathering and storage of intelligence within the Federation, which started last summer, did not seem to have been sufficiently energetically processed in London. It had taken over four months to find a Chief of Intelligence, the establishment for Field Intelligence Officers was not yet filled, even an organiser for a so far non-existent Federal Special Branch was still lacking, and the fine new Aden Intelligence Centre appeared to be a white elephant. He hoped that the Colonial Office would be able to add a new momentum to these matters …..'[609]

In this situation, where both civilian and military intelligence was absent, and given the inaccessibility of the region in general, the sole source of information on which the Cabinet Committee were basing their decisions was the political reporting coming from Trevaskis in the WAP and the Secretariat in Aden. (c) Whilst the Cabinet was asked on numerous occasions to take tough decisions vis-à-vis the protectorate, each decision tended to be treated as a response to a unique and exceptional development, which, if dealt with, would resolve the problem. There was little consideration that the accumulation of events constituted both a pattern and a problem – and a tendency to blame Nasser for everything. The deposition of the Sultan of Lahej in July 1958 was thus presented as an isolated case.

[609] COS 69th Meeting/64 DEFE 4/177.

'The other Sultans and Chieftains appear to be loyal', wrote Macmillan.[610] Earlier, the order to arrest the Jiffri brothers was similarly seen when decided on by the Defence Committee.[611] A whole strategy was based on an assumption that the rulers were not only reliable friends of Britain, but that they also had both the legitimacy, as well as enough power, to control the situation. With one or two exceptions it is clear that they had not. Finlayson remarks:

> 'There seems to have been a selective perception at work here, as in other areas of colonial policy where if the realities of a situation did not clash with Britain's intention they could be acknowledged. However if the realities clashed with Britain's aims they were ignored, or at least played down, and this happened most of the time with Aden.'[612]

The extent to which the Conservative Government was led into a miscalculation based on wrong intelligence and analysis, seeing the threat as an external one rather than home grown is well reflected in a document prepared by the Colonial Office for the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee dated 2 September 1964.[613] Its astonishing reading of the situation starts with the following opening paragraph:

> The internal factors are generally favourable to us, and the achievement of our aim is seriously threatened only by external pressures – principally the campaign of propaganda and active subversions by Egypt, and political pressure by the anti-colonial powers, particularly in the United Nations Committee of Twenty-Four.

The report says 'it will suit the British government to divest themselves of political responsibility of the territory' because the Federation will remain dependent on Britain financially and militarily. The memorandum warns that even after 1970, if the base was vacated there would remain a very costly commitment, saying:

> If we are to achieve an orderly withdrawal from the base and avoid the odium of appearing to be forced out of the base and avoid a state of chaos, it will be necessary to accept heavy additional financial commitments of a continuing nature. These commitments would go far beyond what would be justified by the residual British

[610] 6 July 1958, Catterall (2011), p131.
[611] 11 April 1958, Catterall (2011), p110.
[612] Finlayson (2002), pp 124-5.
[613] CAB 148/9 D.O.(O)(S)(64) 15.

> interests in the territory, and would also be greater than those which our moral obligations would require us to accept.[614]

Ironically, if also logically, the biggest architect of the strategy pursued by the Conservative Government, declared its demise earliest. Trevaskis wrote to Sandys on 20th April 1964, six months before the Labour victory, with a gloomy assessment of the situation:

> Our task of maintaining a British presence and military base in South Arabia indefinitely would, even in the most favourable circumstances, be exceedingly difficult to carry out in the political climate of today. Had we received a year or six months ago what we have been seeking to counter UAR/YAR threat we might have succeeded. As it is a situation has now developed to the point where the only alternative to disengagement and withdrawal are, in addition to the implementation of my comprehensive proposals, a policy of severe repression carried out either by ourselves or by an independent Federation, or agreement with our enemies. It is now for HMG to decide which course to take.[615]

5.6 Duncan Sandys' poisoned chalice and Conservative shortcomings

What legacy did the Conservative government leave on Aden when it left office in October 1964? The Aden insurgency was already in full swing. In the protectorate a large-scale military operation was conducted in Radfan where the insurgents, having made their point, melted away into the mountains. The internal security situation in Aden deteriorated sharply and quickly during the time when Trevaskis was High Commissioner. The grenade attack at Khormaksar Airport on 10 December 1963 is often referred to in British military sources as the start of the "Aden insurgency", or "Emergency" – the latter being a reference to the state of emergency that was declared immediately after the Khormaksar attack, and which lasted until the British withdrawal in November 1967. The number of British military casualties throughout the emergency is cited as 68. There were also British civilian casualties. Casualties amongst the locally enlisted military formations working for the British, Arab civilians and combatants were much higher, although no accurate figures exist.

[614] Ibid.
[615] TREV I/6.

The security situation in the WAP had deteriorated badly but the government insisted on seeing this as the result of outside incursions, rather than a home grown problem. In May, the government sent Sandys to Aden to assess the situation personally.[616] Even before he returned Sandys cabled the Cabinet asking for permission to conduct a widespread bombing of tribal areas, 'to dissuade tribesmen in the federation from harbouring the agitators who were covertly entering federal territory from the Yemen in order to promote disaffection in the Radfan area'.[617] There was disquiet in the Cabinet at this, and concern at public reaction, and the Cabinet only gave limited approval.

On his return from Aden, Sandys gave an upbeat assessment of the military situation to Cabinet on 14 May 1964. He was a bit more cagey when it came to the political situation warning the Cabinet that holding on to Aden would be costly: 'Generosity in this context would ultimately be more economical than an attempt to hold the country down by military force'.[618] In the discussion that followed some members of the Cabinet questioned the overall strategy. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Dilhorne asked 'Where are we going? Is Aden vital, particularly if access [is] now in danger?'[619] At this point the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary the Colonial Secretary and the Defence Secretary all lined up in support of current policy, repeating the usual reasons why Aden was indispensable. Within weeks, however, Sandys was forced to report back to the Cabinet that 'the situation in South Arabia shows signs of deteriorating' and in discussions that followed 'there was general agreement that the situation in the Arabian Peninsula gave cause for increasing concern'.

The Cabinet concluded 'We should need to review our policy in the area in the very near future'.[620] But the Cabinet never did. Instead, perhaps suspecting that they did not have

[616] CAB 128/38 CC (64) 27th
[617] Ibid.
[618] CAB 128/38 CC (64) 28th
[619] CAB 195/24, CM (64) 28th.
[620] CAB 128/38 CC (64) 42nd

long in power, the Conservative Government tried in the summer of 1964 to bring the situation in South Arabia to some conclusion.

The long awaited Constitutional Conference opened in London on 9 June and ended on 4 July with an agreement that by 1968 the Federation of South Arabia would become independent as a unitary state with a President, a Prime Minister and a bi-cameral legislature. Reporting to Parliament Duncan Sandys said:

> The delegates unanimously requested that the Federation should have independence not later than 1968 and that Britain should continue thereafter to retain her military base in Aden for the defence of the Federation and the fulfilment of her worldwide responsibilities. On behalf of the British Government, I agreed to this request and I undertook that we would, at the appropriate time, convene a conference to fix a date for independence and to conclude the necessary defence agreement.[621]

Sandys later referred to this statement to justify his claims that Britain had made a firm promise to defend South Arabia after independence, regardless of whether or not the base in Aden was deemed necessary. However, what Sandys told Parliament was only part of the story. The day the conference ended Sandys told Ministers: 'The majority of the [Federation] member states were secretly reluctant to become independent; but it was necessary to fix a reasonable early date for presentational purposes.'[622] In the same meeting Sandys summed up the complex constitutional web that he had darned:

> It was therefore proposed that Aden should cease to be a Colony and should be accorded the same status as other members of the Federation. This renunciation of sovereignty on the part of the United Kingdom, however, was limited to converting Aden into a Protected State within a Protectorate…[623]

In a dramatic move however, the Fadhli Sultan (Sultan Ahmed bin Abdullah al Fadhli), one of the leading lights in the Conference, went to Cairo immediately afterwards and denounced the whole proceedings as a farce and was immediately deposed. In his

[621] Hansard, 7 July 1964.
[622] CAB 130/200; Minutes of Meeting of Ministers, 3 July 1964.
[623] Ibid.

Parliamentary Statement Sandys accused the Fadhli Sultan of lies and deception, adding: 'He accused my right hon. friend the Prime Minister of having deceived Parliament about the supply of arms to the Yemeni Royalists. That is, of course, totally untrue.'[624]

A general election was held in the State of Aden on October 16, 1964, to choose the 16 elected members of the LegCo. (In the new arrangement the LegCo also had six members nominated by the High Commissioner, and the Attorney General who was a member *ex officio*). 48 candidates contested for the 16 seats. Under the 1964 franchise law, qualified voters had to be males over 21, resident in Aden, and citizens of the state by birth, parentage or naturalisation. Of Aden's total population of about 220,000 some 120,000 came from the Yemen or from other states of the Southern Arabian Protectorate, or were of non-Arab origin; None of these groups qualified for the franchise. Of the 100,000 born Adenis, rather more than half were women and children, and thus ineligible to vote; Of the remainder it was estimated that only about 12,500 were over 21 and therefore eligible to register. Out of a registered electorate of 8,019, a total of 6,377 Adenis voted.[625]

Conservative Government shortcomings.

In assessing Conservative Government's policy and strategy towards Aden it is possible to identify a number of major flaws and shortcomings.

(1) The decision to turn Aden from an insignificant military outpost into Britain's largest military base between the metropole and Singapore was based on false assumptions as to how it could be accommodated in a hostile Middle East political environment. The political assessment on which the decision was based was all coming from one source, namely the Colonial Government in Aden, and more specifically Trevaskis who in

[624] Hansard, 7 July 1964.
[625] Keesings World Report p21292, 19-26 March 1966.

both formal and informal communications provided London with a flawed analysis of the situation.

(2) There is no indication that proper technical feasibility studies were conducted prior to the establishment of the base. Apart from the political environment, the physical environment of Aden made it less than ideal location. The question of flying rights over territories of hostile countries to reach Aden was not properly considered until late, and the costs were added piecemeal from one year to another.

(3) The obsession with holding on to the base in Aden was clouded by ideological baggage. There was myopia due to the traumatic experience of Suez, which demonised Nasserism and exaggerated its strength and the threat that it posed. There was also a general misreading of the situation. This resulted in a failure to properly explore other strategies of dealing and engaging with Arab nationalism, and the Egyptian government in particular.

(4) The personal relationship between Trevaskis and key Conservative politicians, including senior Ministers, Julian Amery in particular, distorted the chain of command, weakening the position of those who were supposed to provide oversight for his work in both Aden and London.

(5) In its dealings with Aden from 1951-64, the Cabinet system failed to provide a joined up government, spent a long time discussing issues but hardly ever took decisions, and failed to question important assumptions that underpinned the whole British strategy.

(6) The Government failed to appreciate the problem of lack of intelligence in the protectorate, and remained fully dependent on one opinionated source. Even when it started realising that Trevaskis was not averse to massaging information, for example

with regard to the attitude of the federal rulers on the issue of the recognition of the republican regime, it failed to move swiftly to remedy the situation.

(7) The government allowed itself to take wrong decisions, for example not recognising the new republican government in Yemen; and indeed the unusual and short-sighted decision to appoint Trevaskis as High Commissioner in Aden – a decision that was not only contrary to usual practice, but one that even at the time could be seen as highly provocative and controversial.

(8) The quest to secure the base was used to justify a shift from the normal Colonial Office practices in the process of decolonisation. This radical departure was never questioned, primarily because the Colonial Secretary himself was instrumental in initiating it. In other territories, Britain prioritised leaving behind a viable state with a government that had a basis of legitimacy, most often sealed with an election. However in Aden and the Protectorate it pulled all the stops to ensure that stooges nurtured by Britain would gain power.

(9) The Conservative Government acquiesced to a policy that depended on human rights abuses as a basis for its success. The idea that Aden's internal affairs be transferred to the Federation so they could be dealt by 'their own customary methods'[626] could never have been understood as being anything but an acquiescence to torture and abuse as a political tool.

(10) The Conservative government sacrificed cross-party consensus on an issue of national importance by following a policy that they knew could not be acceptable for the Labour Party, and consciously chose to ignore this in pursuit of their strategy. Labour was willing to support the retention of the base if it was deemed necessary and viable, and would have gone along with a strategy to retain it, that was founded on a

[626] Mawby, p92.

policy that had a semblance of democracy. A case in point was their co-operation with the Government in August and September 1964 to pass the "Independence of Malta Act" despite reservations, and the strong resistance of the Maltese Labour Party.

5.7 The Labour Party and Arabia.

Labour assumed the reins of government in October 1964 somewhat gingerly, especially when it came to foreign and colonial issues. Labour's majority was so thin that many thought it would not last long, and the civil service were too set in their old ways to adapt rapidly to change in policy. Labour's period in office therefore needs to be seen in two distinct parts: October 1964 till March 1966, and the period subsequent to that when a much more convincing election result returned a more confident and assertive Labour Government. The Conservatives were a broad church and so was the Labour Party. This reflected itself in the party's debates on foreign and colonial policy. On the Labour left there were strong supporters of unilateral nuclear disarmament, rapprochement with the Soviet Union, a swifter process of decolonisation, and an end to the trans-Atlantic special relationship and alliance. On Colonial policy there were special interest groups with connections to the parliamentary party, such as the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the Anti-Colonial Movement; and the Trade Union Movement had its own connections and internal debates on these issues, which they then transposed to the debates in the Labour Party.

These groups certainly had connections with counterparts in South Arabia, and to a much lesser extent in the Gulf, and were sympathetic to their cause. There had been a number of Labour MPs visiting the territory. They did not like what they saw, regardless of 'attempts to pull wool over their eyes'. Some were fiery left-wingers, such as the MP Bob Edwards, others such as Barbara Castle and George Thompson were senior and mainstream figures within Labour. When Harold Wilson became leader on 14 February 1963, it marked the start

of his charismatic but often controversial time at the helm of a party that was experiencing its own problems with managing change, was riddled with factions and facing a very challenging domestic economic situation. Wilson is credited with skill and tact in his approach. Pragmatism and flexibility was for him much more important than dogmatism and ideology. In government, he famously kept the Labour Party united by pushing through changes at such a pace that his backbenchers hardly had time to think. On foreign and colonial policy, Wilson was no soft touch, but pragmatism made him sometimes look indecisive and confused, which he was not, and inconsistent, which he sometimes had to be. As a left wing critic wrote, 'that bloke can do an about turn faster than the sentry outside Buckingham Palace.'[627]

It is often possible to detect blame attributed to the Labour Party in government since October 1964 for the messy British exit from Aden in 1967, a view also shared by several of the Arab protagonists interviewed for this thesis. For example, Hyam states with regards to South Arabia:

> In this trouble-spot, bipartisanship held few attractions for Labour Ministers. Greenwood came into office at the CO determined to reverse Conservative policy by ditching the feudal rulers who had become allies. Instead, and rejecting the advice of his officials, he wanted to involve the UN and decided to negotiate with radical nationalist Al-Asnag, prison graduate and the mastermind behind the influential Aden TUC.[628]

And later he adds:

> The Labour Government made a mess of Aden not least in the context of the cold war. Their Conservative predecessors had dithered and procrastinated and bequeathed an unworkable federation. Labour ministers chipped away at the Federation with a mixture of cravenness and clumsiness without constructing anything to put in place of the federal clients who were being cynically ditched, leading to a humiliating withdrawal and a vicious successor regime dedicated to everything they found repugnant.[629]

[627] Dash;(1969), p178.
[628] Hyam (2006), p355.
[629] Ibid p360.

Ledger, says:

> After the advent of the Labour Government no firm action was taken against the insurgent bases across the border. The Federal Government was given no opportunity to take matters into its own hands and were sometimes actively prevented from doing so. The rule of law was not upheld and legal means to prevent terrorism totally ineffective.'[630]

He concludes that 'only in Palestine did the British leave a territory in such a confusion'.[631]

Mohammed Farid al Awlaqi, the Foreign Minister of the short-lived Federation of South Arabia said that the Labour government's,

> sympathies were with the trade union movement leaders. We knew right from the beginning that their sympathies were not with the Federal Government because they thought they were feudal rulers. We were not properly democratic. But they handed over power to a bunch of thugs who turned out to be communists.[632]

Kennedy Trevaskis, by no means a disinterested party, and with the benefit of twenty years of hindsight, when asked why he thinks that what happened in Aden was 'such a disaster', was somewhat more nuanced and summed the criticism up as follows:

> I think the reason is obvious. The Labour Government, I suppose Greenwood [the Colonial Secretary] in particular, in fact abandoned the policy that we had. Well they had every reason, or could have had every reason to abandon it. I am not saying that what we were doing was right. There may have been alternatives...but they substituted nothing at all, and they ended up by ruling Aden directly. And they finally just walked out, and abandoned Aden to chaos.[633]

Despite the fact that this was the closest that Trevaskis ever came to admitting that the policy he pursued *could* have been wrong, the suggestion that the Labour Government somehow had other options that it could pursue is also not sustainable. Other options that were indeed available as late as 1960, or even one or two years later, were certainly not available by the time Labour got a grip on the issue. The suggestion that British policy was driven after 1964 by some kind of Labour Party solidarity with the Aden TUC and its

[630] Ledger (1983), p223.
[631] Ibid, p226.
[632] Interview, 5 March 1984; BFI/EE/T, Item 26.
[633] Interview, 9 July 1984; BFI/EE/T, Item 39.

political wing the PSP, or even as is also sometimes more bizarrely suggested, with the pro Communist NLF, simply do not match up with the reality and is a simplistic reading of a more complex picture. Closer analysis suggests that the Labour government reaped what the Conservative predecessor had sown. It found an already impossible situation and had few alternatives but to adopt the course of speedy exit. Even if it wanted, it could not continue to support the Federal rulers, nor have an alternative of its own choosing, except at huge political, military, financial and moral costs, which no British government of whatever colour would have been able to justify. The die had been cast long before. There was what appeared to be indecision in the Labour quarters, particularly during the first term of the Wilson Government. The indecision stemmed from, what Darwin calls, 'the fear (which constantly tormented Labour leaders), that to be seen to favour the reduction of British world power and influence would expose them to Conservative attack and arouse patriotic resentment among Labour's own working class supporters.'[634] However, the indecision did nothing more than freeze the military and security situation for a few months, and did not change the greater scheme of things.

Labour's attempt to pick up the pieces.

Labour's National Executive set up a working party to look at its policy towards the region way back in 1958, and amongst the group was also a representative of the TUC.[635] In opposition, Labour back benchers raised issues related to Aden and South Arabia in Parliament occasionally. An incident in 1962 where ATUC members were caned received a lot of attention in the media and generated a number of questions in Parliament, as well as an adjournment debate.[636]

[634] Darwin (1988), p290.
[635] TUC 4 Letter of David Ennals to Don Bowers, 8 December 1958.
[636] Hansard, 11 December 1962.

Ahead of the 1964 general elections the Labour Party International Office prepared a comprehensive brief for Greenwood, the Colonial Secretary in-waiting. George Cunningham produced the report "Problems for an incoming Colonial Secretary" on 27 August 1964 in which he highlighted British Guiana, Southern Arabia and the High Commission Territories in Southern Africa as the areas which would require urgent attention, adding that 'it will be by the results on these three that a Colonial Secretary (if I may say so) will succeed or fail.'[637] This was followed by a more detailed paper a few days later.[638] In as much as there was a Labour Party reading of the situation in Aden and South Arabia, the Cunningham paper summarised it:

> Elections are at last due to take place in Aden at the end of October. The People's Socialist Party boycotted the last elections in 1959 as a protest against the franchise (based on income). They are unlikely to boycott the October elections and are likely to win a majority. Their leader is Abdulla Al-Asnag, also leader of the Aden TUC. Al-Asnag is not against Aden's membership of a South Arabian Federation as long as Aden retains a high degree of local autonomy, so long as the rulers do not dominate the federation and so long as some progress is made towards democratic government in the protectorates. He has carefully refrained from committing himself against the continuation of the British base. Although regarded as an extremist he seems to be losing Nasser's support to even more anti-British elements.

On the base in Aden, the briefing paper said,

> At the heart of our policy in South Arabia must be the question of the continuation of the military base. It is commonly accepted that the base is useful. There is no agreed view on how vital it is – that is on just what things we can do now and would be unable to do without the base.

Cunningham concludes his paper by making five recommendations:

(1) Accept and work with the left wing forces in Aden. Do not manipulate the Constitution to keep them out.
(2) Try to get their agreement for the continuation of the base for a period of years – unspecified, for if we say five years they will have to end it in four for reasons of Arab prestige.

[637] Note of George Cunningham 15 August 1964, GREEN 6310. The paper included two annexes, a brief prepared for the foreign affairs debate that was held in Parliament shortly before, and a note on treaty obligations.

[638] Paper of George Cunningham 27 August 1964. GREEN 6310

(3) Proceed more vigorously with the conversion of the protectorates into reasonably modern states with as much democracy as possible. Use educational and economic assistance to this end.
(4) Warn all the rulers that British protection will be withdrawn in say five years and that they had better make their position secure with their own people and with their neighbours.
(5) If necessary, develop a new air staging post on a small Island after first persuading all inhabitants to accept generous compensation to live elsewhere. There are Islands where this is not a totally impractical proposition.

The actions of the Labour government in its first months in office broadly followed this advice, and were as bold as could be expected. They essentially can be summed up as,

(a) Appointing a new High Commissioner, Sir Richard Turnbull who was not part of the "Aden establishment", nor even an Arabist or Oxbridge educated, but who was credited with helping the peaceful transition of Tanganyka to independence;

(b) Expressing a willingness to engage with a wider set of players including those that had been previously demonised such as ATUC/PSP. This most tangibly meant the appointment of someone with sympathies with ATUC/PSP, Abdel Kawee Makawee, as Aden Chief Minister; it also meant lifting the exile order on a number of former leaders such as the Sultan of Lahej, Mohammed Aidrus, and others who had been sent into exile from 1956-64.

(c) Conducting a defence review to assess both the need and the viability of the military base; and

(d) maintaining in the meantime a holding operation.

However whilst they set out implementing (a), (b), and, (c) in what was, by the standards of most bureaucracies, a speedy fashion, (d) spiralled out of control.

The search for a new High Commissioner was, as described by Baker, 'unusual, probably unique'.[639] It was taken outside the Colonial Office, and was led by Denis Healey. The net was thrown wide enough to be able to exclude having an Arabist selected, but kept

[639] Baker (2010), pp 304-5.

within the realms of the Colonial Office and Foreign Office. Turnbull was an "outsider" to the cosy world of British officialdom in Arabia, but was certainly a part of the establishment.

The second Labour strategy was to try to open up the circle of people with whom negotiations were being conducted. Including Al-Asnag and his ATUC/PSP was not only inevitable, but overdue. The idea that the Labour government was guided in its actions by some kind of left wing solidarity is simply not sustainable. Whilst in party conference resolutions or through some of its backbench MPs it may have expressed solidarity with other Labour and social democratic movements, there are plenty of examples that in its conduct of foreign policy the Labour Government acted differently. In British Guiana and Malta for example 'the Wilson Government was willing to take a tough line with Labour and nationalist figures where US, NATO or British interests would benefit.'[640]

The third Labour decision was to conduct a strategic review to assess the viability and necessity of the base in Aden. Another misperception has led to a belief that the Labour Government was ideologically opposed to a British military base in Aden. Yet in public, as well as in private, Harold Wilson's position was always based on pragmatic, rather than ideological positions. On the eve of the 1964 Labour victory he told European Socialist leaders gathered in London:

> When troops are put in, as in this case, on territory where we are accepted under treaty, it is the duty of the government to give them all necessary backing and the opposition support them in this…. Equally we think it right on all the information available to us, that Aden must be held as an important base, both for communications and as a centre for peacekeeping operations. Whatever measures are necessary to this end must be taken.[641]

Speaking a month later at the House of Commons, Wilson again showed an open mind on the issue:

[640] Wrigley (1993), p132.

[641] Harold Wilson speaking in London on 12 May 1964; From a briefing note prepared for Sandys by Conservative Central Office, DSND 14/1.

> Which bases do we need? Frankly until an opposition becomes the Government it does not possess the secret military information required...So in opposition, as I have said frequently one cannot take a final line on which bases we shall need and, even when [in] the government one has to be flexible and adaptable about it. I therefore stick to what I said in my statement – that on all the information available to us, and subject to what may be found on the issues that I have mentioned, I reckon that we do need Aden as an essential centre for peacekeeping operations in a wide area around...[642]

Once in government, he told the House of Commons on 1 April 1965:

> We are engaged in a deep and searching Defence Review, including roles and commitments. I do not want to prejudice the result of that review, but I say now, as I did last year, that on all we know at present, we need a base in this area if we are to discharge our role of giving assistance to Commonwealth governments when they ask for it. But again as I said last year, and as I hope we have all learned, perhaps the hard way, over the last ten to twelve years, we cannot have an effective base unless it is held with the agreement of the country in which it is situated. [643]

Two months later however, he was even more cautious:

> Our position was stated from that box a year ago. I said then that on all the information available to us we thought that we should need a base [in Aden]. It is difficult to say from the opposition benches, but I said – and I stand by this, as we all do I am sure – that no base is militarily or morally defensible unless it has the support of the people of the territory in which it is sited...Whether Aden will or should play a permanent part in our arrangements, or to what extent it should play a part I cannot say until a Defence review is complete.[644]

Nowadays the civil service briefs the leader of the opposition and key opposition figures in advance of a general election to ensure a smooth transition in case of a change of government, but this is a reasonably new development. Wilson had had a discussion with the head of the Home Civil Service in July 1964, but the focus was on the economy and the organisation of Government[645]. Labour had been out of government for thirteen years and there were few if any members of the Labour team with any experience of defence and

[642] Hansard, 17 June 1964.
[643] Hansard, 1 April 1965.
[644] Hansard, 1 June 1965.
[645] Wilson (1971), p4.

security matters.[646] Parts of the security services were highly suspicious of most Labour politicians including Wilson, so his assertion that he and his team did not have enough information to determine whether the base in Aden was essential or not, nor of its sustainability, has to be accepted at face value.

Once in office, Greenwood argued against keeping the base in a letter to Wilson on 14 June 1965 highlighting its geographical and logistical weakness. Furthermore, Greenwood argued that from a political perspective the base was creating problems for Britain in the United Nations, was hindering the constitutional evolution of Aden, was dependent on an annual cost of £15 million in subsidies of the Federation and a much larger military expenditure 'of dubious value', and necessitated a repressive policy.[647]

However, whilst the political process was being re-adjusted, the situation on the ground continued to deteriorate. There is no evidence to suggest that this deterioration came due to change of government in London or of changes in standard operating procedures (in as much as that happened) by the British administration in Aden, as a result. Violence had started long before the October '64 election and remained at a steadily increasing momentum. Political actions, such as the appointment of Makawee as Chief Minister of Aden (7 March 1965), or his subsequent dismissal (25 September 1965), dented the process, but never really drove it.

In June, Makawee wrote a long letter to Wilson expressing exasperation with Turnbull. He asked Wilson to intervene with relaxing the security situation, including suspending the state of emergency and the release of detainees, and for the British government to recognise the government of Yemen.[648] The letter indicates that the relations between Turnbull and Makawee were at a very low point and it accuses the High

[646] Macmillan wrote in his diary on 11 July 1963, 'I had an hour with Harold Wilson and tried to explain to him how the so-called Security' services really worked. It seemed right to do so and he took it quite well. (He had never heard of C).' Catterall, (2011) p575.

[647] Greenwood to Wilson , 14 June 1965; PREM 13/113.

[648] Makkawee to Wilson, 7 June 1965 PREM 13/113.

Commissioner of insensitivity, and of granting himself more emergency powers.[649] In his reply, through Greenwood, Wilson tried to strike a conciliatory note, saying 'there is more common ground between us than your letter suggests', assuring Makawee that the British government 'wholeheartedly supports self-determination for South Arabia' and asking him to support a Constitutional Commission which the British government was proposing to establish.[650] The Commission had been announced to Parliament by Greenwood on 11 May 1965. However, by July, the Chairman of Sudan Constitutional Court, who was to be one of the three members of the Commission, withdrew, and the Federal Ministers announced that they would not co-operate with it.[651] Greenwood rushed to Aden to try to salvage the situation and persuaded all the sides to come together in London, ahead of a fully-fledged constitutional conference.

It was at this meeting of what was called a 'working group' but which in fact had all the hallmarks of a Lancaster House Conference that the extent of the problem finally dawned on the Labour Ministers. Greenwood wrote to Wilson on 9 August 1965:

> After two days of sparring it became fairly clear that the Aden Delegation and Al-Asnag were looking for an excuse to walk out as a gesture against our "repressive policy" – particularly in respect of the emergency and the base. The Federalis were suspicious that we were in league with the Adenis and Al-Asnag, the Hadhramis were suspicious of everybody. Only al-Habshi of the South Arabian League, was uniformly cheerful and co-operative.'[652]

However, understanding the extent of the problem does not necessarily mean understanding the problem itself. Greenwood in his letter shows that he had been converted to the Aden (and largely Trevaskis') reading of it, namely that the problems in Aden and South Arabia were not home grown but instigated by Egypt. He told Wilson:

> The most remarkable feature of a fairly eventful week was the contrast between the cordiality of Asnag and Makawee in private and their poker-faced

[649] Ibid.
[650] Greenwood to Makkawee PREM 13/113.
[651] Greenwood to Wilson PREM13/113.
[652] Greenwood to Wilson 9 August 1965 PREM 13/113.

hostility in public. Both of them for example, wrote me friendly and apologetic letters within half-an-hour of the talks ending. I am now certain that neither of them, whatever their personal inclinations may be, is a completely free agent. Both are frightened and Makawee is bewildered as well.

The conclusion that I have reached is that neither was in a position to allow the talks to succeed. We must see their intransigence and obstruction against the talk which George Thompson had with Asnag. It is in fact, too early for the UAR to allow tension to be relaxed in South Arabia and I suspect that they will continue the pressure so that they will have some concession to make in return for our recognition of the Yemen Republic Government and our help in freeing them from their entanglement there. If I am right in this analysis, a solution to the South Arabian problem is impossible without a general detente in our relations with Egypt.[653]

The frustration is well expressed in a note from Cabinet Secretary Burke Trend, to Wilson:

Our objective must be to get representatives of all the elements in South Arabia (the political parties, the Aden Government, the Federal States and the Eastern States) around a table to discuss the constitution of an independent South Arabia. It is a ludicrous position that we are anxious to grant independence as soon as possible but cannot get the people concerned even to discuss the sort of independence they would like to have.[654]

On 4 August, while the London conference was ongoing, Wilson hosted a lunch at 10 Downing Street, which was, by any stretch of the imagination, an extraordinary event. Present around the Prime Minister and other officials were not only a number of the Sultans, but also the Chief Minister of Aden (Makawee) – who the British were contemplating arresting a few days later; Abdulla al-Asnag – who had been imprisoned many times and was until recently identified as the chief culprit behind all of Britain's woes in the region; Sheikhan al Habshi, the SAL leader who had been exiled in 1956 and had only just been allowed to return home; and perhaps most bizarrely K.A.M. Khalifah, the person who had been accused (but never found guilty) of trying to kill Trevaskis, and who had been elected to the Legislative Council and been appointed a Minister.[655] This cosy lunch was the climax of Labour's efforts to solve the South Arabian problem through negotiations. After the failure of

[653] Greenwood to Wilson, 9 August 1965 PREM 13/113
[654] Trend to Wilson South Arabia (O.P.D. (65) 119) PREM 13/113.
[655] Table plan at the lunch at 10 Downing Street; GREEN 6311.

these talks any prospect of maintaining a privileged position for Britain in South Arabia faded, and all that the government could do was to make the withdrawal as orderly as possible.

In September 1965, the government decided to suspend the constitution of the Aden State by an Order in Council issued by the Queen. It was a serious step backward and in many ways was the beginning of the end. After this point, neither side felt obliged to keep any niceties any more. Like a number of other events discussed in this thesis, things happened rather suddenly and dramatically, and for reasons that are not fully understandable. It is true that between 9 August and 16 September there had been a number of terrorist incidents, including the high profile assassination of Sir Arthur Charles, the British Speaker of the Aden Legislative Council. However the suspension of the Constitution and the dismissal of the Makawee government did not resolve the problem and was never likely to. It was meant as a way of showing that the British were still in charge. The explosion of violence that followed was predictable, and showed that they were not.

Thus, whilst in August, the Colonial Secretary was contemplating suspending the state of emergency, in September the Queen suspended the Aden Constitution instead. The process was triggered by telegram 998 from Turnbull to Greenwood. It speaks of 'Makawee's recent pronouncements condoning terrorism and publicly recommending dissolution of Federation'. Turnbull identifies five repercussions if firm action is not taken: (a) a further deterioration of relations between Aden and the Federation and a more cynical Federalis[656] attitude to HMG; (b) 'Federal Armed Forces. We have known for months that there was some degree of penetration of Federal Regular Army and Aden Armed Police by NLF. Since Makawee returned triumphantly from London subversion has increased to a most disconcerting level'; (c) the civil service was not ready to serve a Chief Minister who

[656] Around this time it became common in British correspondence to refer to the Federal authorities and/or the federal Ministers as "Federalis".

condoned terrorism; (d) the High Commission, 'My senior officers are wondering how long they can go on in the present atmosphere when the Aden Government is deliberately contemptuous of HMG and HMG's policies'; (e) No prospect of a settlement between Aden and the Federalis.[657] Turnbull recommended that 'we should be ready to suspend the constitution at 24 hours notice.' Turnbull piled up the pressure with a further telegram 1018 on 20 September, in which he told Greenwood: 'We have reached a position in which we cannot sustain any more violent outbursts from Makawee.'[658] On 21 September, in what looks like a co-ordinated move, the Federation's Supreme Council sent a letter in apocalyptic terms to Wilson telling him that 'in the political sphere your government is destroying us', and saying that the 'root of the problem' is the situation in Aden state. There was in the end also a subtle threat: 'Unless Her Majesty's Government is prepared to act quickly we shall be left with no alternative but to seek means of saving our country'.[659] This was followed on 21 September by a letter from the Commander-in-Chief Middle East to the MOD imploring that the Prime Minister takes action, including suspending the Constitution.[660]

Wilson's reaction to the first telegram by Turnbull (No. 998), was made in a comment on file, which the Private Office considered important enough to circulate on 20 September to the relevant departments, 'We ought to be clear whether we should sink or swim on making the Federation permanent? Sacred cow. H.W.'[661]

On 23 September, Trend summarised Whitehall's position to Wilson saying the consensus (minus the Colonial Secretary who had reserved his position) was to suspend the constitution. It left it to the Colonial Office to decide whether or not to arrest Makawee to

[657] Turnbull to Greenwood, 16 September 1965. PREM 13/113.
[658] Turnbull to Greenwood 20 September 1965 PREM 13/113.
[659] CinC Middle East to MOD relaying a message from Supreme Federal Council, 21 September 1965; PREM 13/113.
[660] CinC ME to MOD, 21 September 1965; PREM 13/113.
[661] Wright to Stacpoole 20 September 1965; PREM 13/113.

prevent him from going to New York where he was to address the UN[662]. It stated that abandoning the Federation was not an option, and that, whilst the Defence Review was still ongoing, 'military opinion in the Ministry of Defence is steadily hardening in favour of the view that we shall need to retain some military facilities in Aden indefinitely if our Middle East policy as a whole is to make sense.'[663]

Greenwood on 24 September asked for the Privy Council to be convened to ratify the decision, stating that 'At a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee yesterday it was decided that the recent serious increase of terrorism in Aden, combined with the refusal of the local ministers to co-operate in security measures against it, left no alternative but immediately to suspend the territory's constitution and to enable the High Commissioner to exercise direct rule.'[664] When Turnbull called in Makawee and three of his Ministers to inform them of the Order-in-Council the reaction was far from that predicted. 'Far from being indignant or dejected they were clearly relieved and happy to be quit of their responsibilities. They undoubtedly felt they had got themselves out on to a limb from which they could not return without endangering their lives.'[665] The extent to which Makawee was risking his life became clear a few months later when a bomb planted by the NLF killed his three sons.

In February 1966, the Government finally concluded the Defence Review[666] and published a white paper outlining government policy. The Review stated clearly that Britain would not be holding on to its base in Aden. The whole *raison d'être* for British engagement with South Arabia thus evaporated and the final two years of British rule can only be seen in the context of disengagement. There was of course a wish to hand the territory to a legitimate government that had control over it, and in this way also try to secure a very modest

[662] Turnbull opted not to arrest Makawee, saying he did not want to turn him into a martyr (Turnbull to Greenwood 24 September 1965, PREM 13/113.)

[663] Trend to Wilson, 23 September 1965; PREM 13/113.

[664] Greenwood to Bowden, 24 September 1965; PREM 13/113.

[665] Turnbull to Greenwood, 25 September 1965; PREM 13/113.

[666] There were, however, supplementary documents in 1967 and 1968 reflecting changes resulting from the financial crisis.

privileged position after independence. However, the rot was too deep and Britain had spent too much time and effort destroying the people who could plausibly have delivered this outcome, for it to happen.

5.8 Consensus Lost

The Conservative Party's defeat in the October 1964 general election is often considered a watershed in modern British political history, the end of an era. Yet it took some time for the new reality to sink in. Conservative politicians had been in government for too long and retained for some time the air of arrogance that comes with power, even in opposition. Because senior figures had been in government a long time, they had difficulty adjusting to opposition. 'None of us were accustomed to opposition – we didn't know quite how to handle it', Alec Douglas-Home was quoted as saying.[667] Some members of the Shadow Cabinet turned up late for the first meeting because they had not driven in London for so long they got confused by the new one way system in Mayfair.[668] There was also the hiatus caused by the need to elect a new leader following the resignation of Douglas-Home in July 1965.

It must have been very difficult for Duncan Sandys, who had been a Cabinet Minister for most of the past twenty five years[669], to adapt to a life without an army of civil servants at his behest. There was some talk that Sandys could run for party leader. Julian Amery sounded him out on this at a meeting shortly after the Tory defeat. Sandys in typical fashion told him 'I am only interested in power, not in people, and that is not enough'.[670] Instead, Sandys remained until 1965 the shadow spokesman for Commonwealth and Colonial Affairs. Aden

[667] Young (1970), p222.
[668] Ibid p220.
[669] Since 1940, except for the period of the Labour Government 1945-51.
[670] Note of Julian Amery (for his own records), undated AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 1. Instead, Sandys talked to Amery about 'leaving politics altogether'. At that meeting both Sandys and Amery were of the opinion that 'it would be a great mistake to throw over Home'.

was one of the main topics on his agenda, not least because Sandys continued to be pushed by Amery on the subject. The two ideological allies discussed the extent to which Labour was deviating from their policy when they met soon after the election[671].

Trevaskis was back in touch with Amery from the moment he returned from Aden.[672] He was disillusioned and unemployed, and both Amery and Sandys tried unsuccessfully to use their connections to find him a job. In the meantime, for the next three years Trevaskis provided the Conservative opposition with information about British actions and policy in Aden, which he was getting from the network of officials that made up his team in Aden.[673]

Six months later, Trevaskis still seemed to be shell shocked by his dismissal. Writing to Amery and Sandys he still spoke of 'the problem confronting us in South Arabia' and the 'need to know our objective and how we propose to attain it', a question that he subsequently answered in the same letter, saying, '…there is only one practical course of action compatible with British interests open to H.M.G. and that is for them to return to the policy of the previous administration'.[674] The reality had clearly not yet sunk in.

On many colonial issues, Greenwood was able to maintain a bi-partisan policy, but not on Aden. When Amery was relegated to the backbenches, he wrote to Greenwood: 'I would like to send you my thanks for the consideration which you and the office always showed me, and for the help you gave me, both in Aden and Gibraltar. Except for Aden, I do not think there was any real difference between us at any point'.[675] Both Amery and Sandys persisted, and even increased their attacks on the government on the question of Aden when

[671] AMEJ/1/7/7 pt 1.

[672] Trevaskis to Amery, 29 December 1964, AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 1

[673] There was also some communication from other officials in Aden with Amery directly. For example B.M. Somerfield, the Political Officer in Dhala wrote to Amery on 8 August 1965 with a very detailed account of what was going on in that part of the country. The letter, written on the letterhead of the British High Commissioner's Office in Al Itihad ends, 'One thing we are all very interested in is when will you be back in the chair. We rather hope it will be before the end of the year? Before they do further damage.' This letter seems to be part of a longer correspondence since it was in reply to one that Amery had written to Somerfield on 12 July. AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 2.

[674] Trevaskis to Amery, copied to Sandys, 21 July 1965, AMEJ 1/7/7 pt2.

[675] Amery to Greenwood, 20 October 1965, GREEN 6311.

they were dropped from the Shadow Cabinet. Trevaskis also continued supplying information and advice, which provided the ammunition for the politicians to fire.

Early in 1966, Trevaskis was able to give information to Amery and Sandys about the decision to abandon the Aden base ahead of the government announcement in a Defence White Paper that was presented in Parliament on 22 February. On 12 February, he wrote to Amery:

> I have received a 'cri de coeur' from Aden and hasten to inform you of what is about to take place.
>
> My informant, Robin Young, tells me that he and Baille [the Deputy High Commissioner] (the two persons responsible for the Federation), have been seen by Turnbull and told that H.M.G will (a) withdraw from the Aden base in 1968 and (b) undertake no further defence commitment in so far as the Federation is concerned thereafter.
>
> Beswick, he told me, will be going to Aden, on or about the 19th of this month to break the news to the Federal Ministers.
>
> Turnbull has refused to argue the toss with HMG[676] and both Young and Baillie are naturally deeply upset at what will happen to our Arab friends when we go. The inclination is to advise them to get the best terms they can from Nasser while they still have a chance. They have however now turned to me for advice. I write to let you know of this so that you will have a chance of brooding on it before we meet on Wednesday. The withdrawal of the base I had expected, but not the total betrayal of our friends.[677]

Sandys wrote to Trevaskis on 21 February:

> It was very helpful to receive from you authoritative advance warning about the future plans for Aden. I issued a statement to the Press on Friday (copy attached) and I spoke on Television that night in the same sense. I think it would be a good thing if you, Julian and I were to have another word together very soon after the White Paper is published. We can then consider what advice should be given to our friends in South Arabia.[678]

[676] Turnbull had just returned from London, where, amongst other things he attended on 4 January 1966 a meeting of the Sub-Committee on South Arabia of the Defence and Oversea Committee (Official) at the Cabinet Office. Turnbull had been quite candid about the situation. He described the South Arabia Federation as 'an artificial creation brought into being essentially in order to buttress the Aden base; it was economically unviable, socially underdeveloped and politically unstable'. He warned that unless an announcement of the closure of the base would also be accompanied by a commitment to continue paying the current annual subsidy of £12 ½ million a year for a substantial period after independence, the Federation would dissolve into chaos. The representative of the Treasury was however against a long-term commitment, and the feeling was that there should be some commitment for a shorter period. OPD(O)(AS)(66)1st; CAB 148/78

[677] Trevaskis to Amery, 12 February 1966, AMEJ 1/7/7 pt 2.

[678] Sandys to Trevaskis, 21 February 1966; DSND 14/1/1.

On the same day the Shadow Cabinet (known at this time as the Leader's Consultative Committee) discussed the Defence White Paper and amongst other things agreed 'to oppose categorically an announcement of a date for withdrawing from the Aden base'.[679] Sandys position both in public and in private was that he had, on behalf of Britain, given a clear promise to the rulers of South Arabia that, if they wished it, Britain would conclude a defence agreement for the continued protection of their country after independence.[680] It is this promise that is often cited with reference to 'the betrayal of our friends' in speeches of Conservative politicians, and also in some of the literature. In his statement, Sandys described the actions of the Labour government as 'irresponsible and discreditable'. He also sought to shift the blame for an increasingly difficult situation in Aden onto them, saying that 'Ever since Mr Anthony Greenwood's flirtation with the extremists, the influence and the authority of those whose duty it is to maintain law and order has been progressively undermined. Terrorism has steadily increased and a succession of British servicemen and their wives and children have been killed or injured by bombs and hand grenades.'[681]

For a while leaks by Trevaskis created serious difficulties for the Labour Government. Wilson himself admits feeling the pressure:

> Day after day the press screamed such headlines as "Challenge to Wilson", "Wilson faces new Crisis", "Wilson lashed in Aden row", "Wilson misled MPs", "Move to censure Wilson".[682]

In Parliament, Sandys proposed a motion of censure, but Wilson says that Heath, 'willing to wound but fearing to lead, half associated himself with it', but in the end no division was called.[683] It is not clear if Wilson knew how Sandys was getting his information. In his

[679] LCC (66) 96th Mtg Minutes, DSND 14/1.
[680] DSND 14/1; Statement by the Rt Hon Duncan Sandys MP, 4 March 1966.
[681] Ibid.
[682] Wilson (1971) p231.
[683] Ibid.

memoirs he says that 'Sandys received information from some of the feudal sheikhs'[684], but in Parliament he said 'we have had the clear fact that certain right hon. gentlemen have been in very close touch with certain groups and individuals in South Arabia and have done nothing but harm to what we have been trying to do.'[685]

Sandys continued with what had now become more of a personal campaign against disengagement from South Arabia. In an open letter to the Prime Minister on 1 March 1967, he rubbed the point in: 'In the Defence Debate in Parliament yesterday, I complained that the Government had been guilty of a breach of faith towards the Federation of South Arabia, in that they had repudiated the solemn promise given by Britain to continue to afford protection to the Federation after independence.'[686]

It seems that for a while, Sandys may have felt liberated from the constraints of the frontbench. His statements and actions became much more radical and controversial. He corresponded regularly with the rulers of the Federation, including with Mohammed Farid and the Sharif of Beihan, and met them when they were in London[687]. He travelled in the region, even going into Yemen, where he 'spent a night in a cave at the Royalist headquarters'.[688]

The situation caused some embarrassment to Edward Heath, since it became public knowledge that Sandys was not working with the blessing of the party leadership. In April 1967, the Tories forced a parliamentary debate on Aden. It was an acrimonious debate in which George Brown, on perfect form, taunted the Tory leadership, and Heath in particular, who although present did not speak, and chose instead to heckle. Once more no division was called. The following day the *Daily Mail* wrote,

[684] Ibid.
[685] Hansard, 24 May 1966.
[686] Sandys to Wilson, 1 March 1967, DSND 14/1.
[687] DSND 14/1.
[688] Sandys to Mohammed Farid 24 April 1967, DSND 14/1.

> Mr Brown [The Foreign Secretary] forcefully maintained that the Tory leaders had pressed for the debate only because they knew Mr Sandys would have otherwise done so. It was not so much about the internal problems of Aden as the internal problems of the Tory Party.[689]

Sandys continued to rely on Trevaskis for leaked confidential information. On 25 April 1967, Trevaskis sent Sandys minutes of the meeting Foreign Office Minister George Thompson had with the Federation. He told him, 'May I please have them back not later than 2nd of May, since I have to return them and would not wish my "Sonia" [sic] to know that they have left my hands.'[690] Sandys wrote back thanking him for the 'interesting' enclosures and asking Trevaskis to continue to keep him informed of any new developments.[691]

Not all of Trevaskis' information for Sandys was equally reliable or serious. In December 1966 Trevaskis told Sandys that informers had told him of Nasser's plans to intensify terrorism and create the maximum disorder in Aden, in order to install Makawee as a head of a new government who would then call in the Egyptians. Trevaskis appears completely oblivious to the fact that the Egyptians were not at this point at all in control of the insurgency, and that in any case Makawee (who had been supported by ATUC for the post of Chief Minister in 1964 only because he was a face considered acceptable for the British) would have been the last person to be proposed for such a role.[692] But perhaps the most surreal communication was the one that Trevaskis sent to Sandys on 13 September 1966 regarding who should be President of South Arabia. Apparently the Saudis had been pushing for Sultan Ali Abdul Kerim to be designated. Trevaskis tells Sandys, 'I myself – and I am sure that you also – have not the least doubt that Ali would serve neither our, nor the [Saudi]

[689] Daily Mail, 11 April 1967. "Tories duck vote on Aden".
[690] Trevaskis to Sandys, 25 April 1967; DSND 14/1.
[691] Sandys to Trevaskis, 28 April 1967;DSND 14/1.
[692] Trevaskis to Sandys, 7 December 1966; DSND 14/1.

King's interests. He is weak and unreliable and could be expected to rat to Nasser if things went at all badly.'[693] Trevaskis then adds:

> Our friends have got together in Aden, and in the absence of the Sheriff, agreed that he should be the President. Following their agreement, Muhammad Farid came here with the mission of obtaining Sheriff's acceptance. Contrary to our expectations, the Sheriff is reluctant – I think quite genuinely – to accept and is urging that Muhammad Farid should be President instead. His arguments are that he himself is too old and too unsophisticated, that Muhammad will give the Federation a better image abroad and so on. In the event before seeking King Faisal's blessing to this proposal, they want to know whether our friends here, and in particular yourself, are agreeable to it.[694]

One can sense Trevaskis longing for previous powers, for the days when he could make and unmake Sultans. The reality was that here was an unemployed former colonial official, writing to a backbench opposition MP, asking for his blessing as to who should be President in the world's next new country. The situation is so surreal that one needs to ask the question if Trevaskis was once more massaging facts to suit his objectives, in this case of making himself still look relevant in the eyes of Sandys, as well as playing to Sandys own ego. There is no record of a reply from Sandys to this letter, and it could be that the shrewd Sandys did not take the bait.

5.9 Consensus Regained

Even the most enthusiastic supporter of a continued British presence would have had to admit that the colony and base in Aden had no intrinsic value higher than to protect British interests in the Persian Gulf. These interests were mainly economic and political. Conservative logic was based on the assumption that if Aden was no longer there, British interests in the Gulf would collapse. There were those who argued that a new 'Aden' could

[693] Trevaskis to Sandys, 13 September 1966 DSND 14/1

[694] Ibid. The sudden modesty of the Sheriff of Beihan is uncharacteristic, especially when one remembers that he had been vying for this position for years. It is a good indication that this, the shrewdest of the Federalis, was already sensing that the Federation was a sinking ship and did not want to be its captain whilst it sank.

be built somewhere else. Kamran Island was often mentioned, as was Masirah. Some wanted to expand the rudimentary facilities in Sharjah and Bahrain. But Britain at this point had neither the money nor the stomach for such new adventures, and whilst there was no lack of budding Trevaskises around, they were this time held firmly in check.

The Labour Government embarked on a three-year period of soul-searching on defence shortly after being elected. The Statement on the Defence Estimates in February 1965 stated:

> The present government has inherited defence forces which are seriously overstretched, and in some respects dangerously under equipped….There has been no real attempt to match political commitment to military resources, still less to relate the resources made available for defence to the economic circumstances of the nation…[695]

Denis Healey set in train the process of trying to redress that. The defence review however, whilst initially reporting in 1966 stretched for a further two years. It could not be said to have been finished until the momentous decision of the Cabinet on 15 January 1968 to withdraw East of Suez. This brought to an end a debate about Britain's role in the world that had been ongoing for at least a decade. It was one of several key decisions taken in a series of eight Cabinet meetings held over eleven days and lasting for thirty two hours where the government had to agree on measures to take after devaluation and which finally brought Britain close to accepting the realities of its own circumstances.[696] With hindsight, most analysts agree that this decision was inevitable. The best proof of this perhaps is that the Conservatives, once they were re-elected, did not reverse it. At the time however, it suited the Labour Government to couch the decision in political, quasi-partisan terms. The pains of the new economic hardships at home were shown to be shared around with British defence and foreign postures. If Labour's sacred cows, such as health and education, had to suffer cuts,

[695] Cm 2592, February 1965.
[696] Bennett, (2013), p96.

than so must expenditure on foreign bases and military hardware. In fact this was a pattern that all governments up to the present, have subsequently followed, and reflects the stark reality that the country would not accept anything else.

The Labour Cabinet included political heavyweights such as Brown (Foreign Office), Callaghan (Home Office), Healey (Defence), Jenkins (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Castle (Transport), Benn (Technology), Crosland (Trade), and others, all fighting their corner for their respective departments, pet projects and ideological stances. Jenkins says that the most difficult part of the discussion was about what he calls 'the "controversial quadrilateral": the postponement of the plan to raise the school-leaving age from 15 to 16; the reintroduction of prescription charges; the cancellation of the contract to buy F-111 strike aircraft from the United States and the date for the withdrawal of British forces from East of Suez and the Persian Gulf.'[697] The Cabinet Minutes indicate that there was a last minute attempt to delay the withdrawal by a year, due mainly to a plea from the Prime Minister of Singapore and a last minute message from President Johnson, but it finally agreed, 'that the withdrawal of our forces from Singapore and Malaysia and from the Persian Gulf should be completed by the end of the calendar year 1971.'[698]

In many ways the decision on the withdrawal East of Suez was exemplary of good collective government. The debate on the issues was comprehensive. The different options were well considered and costed. The Cabinet benefitted from the opinion of those of its members who had been consulting with all the key stakeholders in the previous days. There were clear options in front of it, and finally after a comprehensive discussion it took a collective decision. This, in itself, made the 'East of Suez' decision robust, leaving no ambiguities for the civil service to play with, and indeed leaving very little room for the

[697] Ibid.
[698] CAB 128/43 CC (63) 7th

Conservative government that followed to change it. With a clear political decision now taken, and with little or no prospect that it would be changed in the life of the present government, Whitehall adopted a far more coherent and disciplined attitude in managing the difficult process of disengagement, focusing on making the political decision taken work in the best interest of Britain, rather than trying to subvert it, as had to a certain extent happened in Aden.

Managing change in the Gulf

In the debate prior to the decision to withdraw, the Cabinet heard from the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Goronwy Roberts, who reported:

> In the last week he had visited all the countries of the Persian Gulf. He had seen the Shah of Iran, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and the Rulers of the various Persian Gulf States, and had communicated to them the decision of the Cabinet to withdraw our forces from the Persian Gulf not later than the end of the financial year 1970-71. Reactions had ranged from the practical readiness of the Shah and King Faisal to work out alternative arrangements for preserving stability in the area after our withdrawal, to downright panic on the part of the Rulers of some of the smaller States. Some Rulers had urged that we should not withdraw at all; and there had been some suggestion that some of the wealthy oil States might offer to pay part of our defence costs. All the Rulers had agreed that any public announcement of the date of withdrawal would be dangerous for the future stability of the area in that it would enable subversive elements to plan more effectively to exploit the situation following our withdrawal.[699]

The decision subsequently taken by the Cabinet however left no room for ambiguity. The day for withdrawal was firmly set as the end of 1971. The fixed date, rather than precipitating a crisis as had been predicted, proved to be highly beneficial. It helped focus minds. Thus, if the period 1962-67 was a period of discord where the political consensus was broken, 1968-72 can be seen as a period of harmony where the positions of the different stakeholders once again coalesced. It can also be seen as a successful period for British diplomacy. For Britain to achieve its objective of securing an orderly withdrawal from the

[699] CAB 128/43 CC (68) 7th

Persian Gulf, and a privileged position afterwards, a number of issues had to be resolved. Most of these issues had been festering for many years, some for centuries. Managing them satisfactorily over a short period of less than four years was a feat in itself. The region was backward. It had to be brought into the 20th century. Luckily, for most of the states, money was no longer the issue since revenues from oil started arriving in great quantities around this time. Where necessary, leaders were replaced, such as in Abu Dhabi and Muscat and Oman. The region needed consolidation. But unlike in South Arabia the rulers were allowed to play it out between themselves, with a little bit of support and nudging. When the aim of a Federation of nine states could not be achieved, Britain happily gave its blessing for one of seven. Territorial disputes and claims were always the trickiest bit of Britain's presence in the region, and remained so until the end. There were disputes between the Trucial States themselves, but more serious issues were the Iranian claims on Bahrain and on the islands of the Two Tunbs and Abu Musa, the Saudi claim on Buraimi, and in a wider context the Iraqi claims on Kuwait. British diplomacy succeeded in resolving the Iranian claim on Bahrain through a face saving exercise under the auspices of the United Nations. There remains intense speculation as to whether in return Britain acquiesced to the occupation by Iran of the Two Tunbs and Abu Musa in the hours before the British departure, at the expense of the sheikhdoms of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. Luce is sometimes blamed for giving the Shah the green light to invade. We cannot yet say, for if there is one aspect of the end of British rule in the Gulf that remains a closely guarded secret it is Britain's role in this story. Britain was more successful in persuading Saudi Arabia to be a more constructive player in its relations with its smaller neighbours. The Gulf Co-operation Council was established in 1981. Not quite the "Arabian Solidarity Shield" that Luce had envisaged, but not far off either. At least vis-à-vis Bahrain, Saudi Arabia is now the senior partner in a very unequal relationship. Britain was also adept during the execution of this process at managing the egos

of the key players involved. The knowledge accumulated over the years could be put to good use. All in all, it is quite correct to say that Britain's objective, of maintaining a privileged position in the Gulf after 1971 was achieved. In the pursuit of these goals there was a convergence of views between Labour ministers and officials, especially in the period when Michael Stewart headed the Foreign Office. This was an important factor in the restoration of broad consensus on issues related to the Persian Gulf.

The Foreign Office, having satisfactorily 'nativised' its own Ministers turned its attention to the Conservative party. The Party had made considerable efforts since Heath was elected leader to update its policies, including its stand on Arabia. However it remained a broad church with many inside it who held strong views on Britain's world stature. Heath had therefore to move forward whilst keeping on board all those who wanted to move backwards. Heath tried to make the most from Labour's discomfort at events in Aden, but this was never 'his' battle, and in any case the problem in Aden had the fingerprints of the previous Conservative government all over it. He was therefore much more comfortable making his own mark on the situation in the Persian Gulf where he could take a tough line with the government, and not be seen pandering to his own right wing. This made the prospect of a return to consensus politics unlikely. After the 'East of Suez' decision was announced, Heath told Parliament that a Conservative Government 'shall ignore the time phasing laid down by the Prime Minister and his government for the Far East and the Middle East. We shall support our country's friends and allies and we shall restore the good name of Britain.'[700]

Things came to a head when Heath visited the Gulf region in the Spring of 1969. The Foreign Office, and particularly the men on the spot, including the Resident, Sir Steward Crawford were very apprehensive. They felt that they had done a decent job post-January 1968 in keeping the situation stable, in nudging the local rulers to push for reform and

[700] Hansard, 18 January 1968.

modernisation, and in initiating discussions with all interested parties about the future of the region. This was all based on the assumption that the British departure was irreversible. The prospect of Heath travelling round the region promising to reverse the decision filled officials with trepidation. Things became particularly sticky in Tehran where Heath came out from a meeting with the Shah with the impression that Iran wanted the British to stay in the Gulf, something the Shah later denied. Officials referred in frustration to 'the current unhelpfulness of Mr Heath's public statements'.[701]

Subsequently the Foreign Office Arabian Department, responding to queries from posts, tried to summarise the Conservative position, saying there was no consensus among the Tory leadership. The assessment prepared by Donald McCarthy said, 'Mr Heath seems to operate a Shadow presidency rather than a Shadow Cabinet. I have some reason to doubt whether Sir A Douglas-Home goes all the way with him on this topic. I do not think it has been talked through with Mr Maudling or Mr Macleod, let alone with Mr Enoch Powell. Mr Amery of course is right behind the best Joseph Chamberlain he has got and determined to save the Gulf from that puppet of the Communists, Nasser. Mr Sandys is remarkably quiet, and we do not hear in the matter from Sir Edward Boyle.'[702] The assessment adds:

> The rationale which emerges from people like Mr Kershaw and Mr Amery runs something like this. We are going to be in power in 1970 and our troops will still be there…..Maybe a complete reversal is not quite the answer for one reason or another, though we are sure that our friends want it. But there are useful variants. One is that you stay with smaller forces and you keep the present treaties; if you feel that you need, or are entitled to demand, some *quid pro quo* you might make it clear in return that this tiresome and unfair commercial enterprise by French and German and Japs is not to be encouraged. A second possibility is that you do not exactly reverse the present policy but simply fail, for five years or so, to carry it through. In return your friends are grateful, and can be expected or required to federate properly, and with their bigger respectable neighbours the Saudis and the Iranians, secure both general stability and British commercial stakes. A third possibility and the conclusive answer to dismal officials who do not think that we can reverse the decision to withdraw troops and who do not think that treaties without teeth is much, is that you withdraw the troops from the Shaikhdoms. But you put them, or a battalion's worth at

[701] McCarthy to Crawford, 8 May 1969; FCO 8/979.
[702] ibid

> any rate, among the abundant water supplies at Masirah and *voila* – teeth after all and we and our friends are all happy.[703]

But as the assessment further implies, Mr Heath's thinking, particularly after his return from the Gulf, was mellowing and 'he seems to have increased the hedge against his bets by emphasising "if our friends want", "if we do not find it too late" and so on,[704]' even as he was warning the Foreign Office that the Conservatives would change the policy on the Persian Gulf and the Foreign Office should be working out how to do it.[705] Heath's Damascene moment happened only days after he had a long meeting with Luce on the situation in the Persian Gulf.

Like Heath, Luce had just visited the region. He was there on behalf of the business interests he was now representing. However, the visit was organised with the precision and care of a royal tour. He sometimes stayed with the head of the largest British company or more often at the British representation. The Resident, Political Agents and Ambassadors organised dinners to which the local dignitaries were invited, and Luce met with the Rulers, the Saudi King and the Shah. Luce's visit partly overlapped in time with Heath's, but the two did not meet during their travels. Instead Luce wrote to Heath whilst in Abadan waiting to travel to Tehran[706],

> Our paths have crossed. I have just completed a month's tour of Saudi Arabia and the whole Gulf, and am now on my way to Tehran.
>
> If I had had the opportunity of seeing you I would have begged you not to say anything to the Rulers in the Gulf which may cause them to relax their efforts to form their federation. There are still many difficulties in front of them, but there has been some progress since my last visit eleven months ago; and for a variety of reasons which I have not got time to explain, I am more than ever convinced that the success of the federation is of the highest importance for the future stability of the Gulf area, and therefore of British interests. But as you know Arabs are not good at sustained

[703] Ibid.

[704] Heath wrote a long article in the *Sunday Times* outlining his views on the Gulf on 27 April 1969. This article was informed by Heath's visit to the region, but no less so by what he was subsequently told by Luce when he met him at the House of Commons on 24 April, shortly after they had both returned from the region.

[705] Macarthy to Crawford, 8 May 1969 FCO 8/979.

[706] Luce to Heath, 1 April 1969; LUCE G13.

effort, and if the Gulf rulers, particularly Sheikh Isa of Bahrain, think that they can sit back and wait for a Conservative victory in 1970 and the continued presence of British forces, then the momentum of the federation movement will be lost, not only now but for all the time.

I am not for a moment suggesting that you should not keep your options open, but I am pleading that they should be as non-committal as possible at this stage.

Time is against me and I cannot begin to explain the complexities of the gulf situation as I see them. But if there were any chance of a talk when we are both back in England, I should greatly welcome it.

I am sure you will understand that I am not pushing any official line; my views are based entirely on independent judgement and my knowledge of the Gulf Area.

I hope this letter does not sound presumptuous; it is only that I feel strongly on this subject.

Even if Luce was not pushing any official line, his concerns were very much the FCO's concerns and by writing this letter to Heath at this very crucial moment he was putting himself very much on the same page as the FCO. Heath replied on 15th April saying he had received the letter in time, and he took full account of it when meeting the Rulers thereafter.[707] Luce met Heath at the House of Commons on 24 April 1969. Luce expressed doubts about the wisdom of retaining British forces in the Gulf. As the Foreign Office noticed his article a few days later Heath 'seemed to hedge'[708].

Luce's own thinking on the Gulf had evolved. He was no longer adamant on a British military presence beyond 1971. He was no longer sceptical about the success of a federation of emirates if it could be created. Quite why and how is not clear, but certainly by this point the pragmatic and flexible Luce was reflecting what had become consensus opinion of Labour ministers, the Whitehall machinery, particularly the Foreign Office, the "men on the spot", and the new but increasingly important element in the equation, British business, a sector that Luce was now representing. That Luce should be the man to bring the Conservative Party back to consensus was logical. Politically and ideologically Luce was

[707] Heath to Luce, 15 April 1969. LUCE G13.
[708] McCarthy to Mr Arthur, 3 June 1969; FCO 8/979.

pukkah[709], but he was not burdened by romantic illusions. He hardly ever used the term 'friends' in reference to the Gulf rulers. 'Protégés' was more in his vocabulary. On the other hand, the Conservatives needed a way out of the position into which they had earlier boxed themselves in.

The Conservative victory in the June 1970 election was greeted with pleasure by Gulf rulers, who had been convinced that the withdrawal decision was an ideological Labour policy and that the Conservatives in government would reverse it. Amery wrote, 'I stayed the weekend of June 28th with Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi. He was more than delighted at the Conservative victory, as I was told, were all the other Sheikhs and notables in the Gulf. I was told that in Bahrain, notables and merchants immediately went up to call on Sheikh Issa and congratulated him on his victory at the elections.'[710]

The Sultan of Muscat cabled Amery on 21 June congratulating him.[711] He also sent him samples of the new Muscat and Oman currency, which Amery acknowledged, adding he thought the Conservatives would now be in government for the rest of the decade. 'There is thus a fairly firm foundation on which our friends, and we ourselves can build.' Amery explained that his Ministerial brief covered domestic issues, but said that he trusted that 'the change in government here will relieve some of the pressures that have been developing against your country and your northern neighbours.'[712] Little did either of them realise that before the month was out the Sultan would be deposed in a coup planned and executed by Britain.

Within days of the Conservative election, Luce was called in by Sir Denis Greenhill, the PUS at the FCO. He was sounded out about an appointment as Special Representative to

[709] His brother, Admiral Sir John Luce was much admired by the Conservatives for resigning as First Sea Lord in 1966 in disagreement with Labour's policies to scrap the building of a new aircraft carrier. William Luce's son later was also a Conservative Minister under Mrs Thatcher.

[710] Amery, File note, 'Abu Dhabi', AMEJ 1/7/15.

[711] AMEJ 1/7/15.

[712] Amery to the Sultan of Muscat; 10 July 1970. AMEJ 1/7/15.

the Gulf region. Sir Denis told him that others were being considered for the job too. Invariably, Luce would have been the favourite of the FCO establishment.[713] It is not known if Trevaskis was under consideration at all. However, his star had waned with those of his patrons. Sandys was completely marginalised by the new Conservative government and Amery exiled to Public Works, far away from the Gulf action.

Around this time, in an unusual exercise of internal democracy, especially for the time, the Foreign Office invited its relevant overseas posts to comment on a number of elements of British policy in the Gulf. The result was summarised in a note by the Arabian Department dated 20 July 1970:

> None of H.M. representatives consulted has expressed a positive view that a prolongation of the British presence in the Gulf would facilitate the achievement of our twin aims (which all posts endorse) of settling disputes and building stability in the area' and that 'with the exception of H.M. Ambassador in Jedda none of H.M. representatives believes that the Government to which they are accredited would welcome prolongation of the British presence.[714]

This exercise helped seal the position of the Conservative government. The "friends" had said thank you, but no thank you.[715]

The new states of Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates came into being in 1971. British Forces left the Persian Gulf in December 1971 after the abrogation of the Treaties that had bound the region to Britain.

Conclusion

Bi-partisan consensus on colonial policy broke down in the 1960s due to differences on the need and the ability to maintain a permanent British military presence in the Middle

[713] Note on 'Persian Gulf Assignment July 1970 – January 1972 summarising meeting on 3 July 1970 with Sir Denis Greenhill. The note seems to be for public consumption and is unfinished. (LUCE G51).

[714] "British Policy in the Gulf. Summary of replies from posts to PUS questionnaire", Arabian Department, 20 July 1970; LUCE; G14.

[715] The Summary says the Resident had reported that the Gulf Rulers, 'whilst expecting the British special political position in the area to be liquidated on schedule, would welcome a continuing defence commitment without the presence of British troops on their soil'. Ibid.

East. Conservative attempts to manipulate the post-independence political order in South Arabia to secure at any cost the base in Aden backfired, leaving the Labour government that succeeded it few options apart from an orderly withdrawal. In its actions and deliberations the Conservative Government was driven by an obsession to redress the humiliation of Suez, and an unrealistic desire to maintain a global posture that could not be sustained given Britain's economic circumstances. In contrast, Labour's decision to withdraw militarily East of Suez, and instead focus on securing a lasting political and economic privileged position for Britain in the Gulf, was based on pragmatic considerations, and a new consensus developed around it by the end of the decade. Whilst Kennedy Trevaskis contributed to the breakdown of the bi-partisan consensus, William Luce helped restore it.

Conclusions and reflections

The unusual way in which Britain's empire in Arabia was connected politically and constitutionally to the metropole created an opportunity for the process of British disengagement from the region to be done differently here than in most of the rest of the empire. On the other hand, the perceived – in some instances exaggerated – view, of the importance of the territories – strategically and economically – provided the justification for decisions to be taken that are often seen as "puzzling". In the 1950s and the 1960s, at a time of internal political discord in the metropole, a decline in Britain's world stature, and in a tense cold-war global political environment, a last stand on the barren rocks of Aden had a logic that has since faded with the benefit of hindsight.

Strong personalities – in the metropole, amongst the men on the spot, and among local leaders – played a crucial role in decision-making, and informal networks from among these three constituencies worked in parallel with the established formal channels, impacting policy and driving the decision-making process. In Chapter 5, the thesis argued that these networks initially contributed to a break in the political consensus within the metropole, but eventually also helped to reconstruct it. Except for the MOD, who preferred Aden to remain a colony, and the Sultan of Mahra, who wanted to keep the arrangements he had with Queen Victoria, everybody understood that change was inevitable. However, the way that individuals and institutions perceived change, and adapted to it, often determined the success or otherwise of their endeavours.

In Chapters 3 and 4, the thesis has shown how the manipulation of local elites was the tool of choice used by Britain and its "men on the spot" in their endeavour to secure a lasting privileged position in the post-imperial world. This entailed a constant use of both soft and

hard power, and this approach was pursued, regardless of the politics of the governing party in London.

Similarities in the process of imperial disengagement.

This tangled tale of Britain's last imperial stand in the Middle East is far from a unique case of how modern empires have handled imperial retreat. The story has echoes in two other imperial exits in the late 20th century: the French disengagement from Algeria from 1946 to 1962; and Russian efforts to maintain a privileged position in Georgia, immediately before and after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and since.

Comparisons are often odious, and there are indeed many substantial core differences between Britain, France and Russia, as they existed in their "end of empire" moment. France and Russia, unlike Britain, had seen large parts of their territory occupied in WWII. The established order had been discredited – in France by the Vichy government, and subsequently by the dysfunction of the Fourth Republic; in Russia, after the euphoria of victory, by the excesses, and incompetence, of the command economy and the communist system. The level of repression within the different empires was also different, as was their benevolence towards their subjects. That, not to mention the great difference between the three imperial possessions in question: British Arabia, the Soviet Caucasus and French North Africa. Yet, even without the same benefit of the rigorous analysis backed by extensive archive material that this thesis has pursued with regards to the British exit from Arabia, it is possible, on the basis of empirical and anecdotal evidence and the general literature, to reflect on similarities that existed in the process of imperial disengagement in the three circumstances.

(1) The end of empire was both a cause and a consequence of internal political turmoil.

Most historians agree that the British, French and Soviet empires ended as a result of a combination of internal and external causes, although no two historians seem to agree about the extent to which one factor is more important than the other. "End of empire" occurred at a time of internal political turmoil in Britain, France and the USSR/Russia, and "the end of empire" itself was both a cause and a consequence of this turmoil. As Horne says, the conflict in Algeria 'toppled six French Prime Ministers and the Fourth republic itself. It came close to bringing down General de Gaule and his Fifth Republic and confronted metropolitan France with the threat of civil war'.[716] The conflicts on the fringes of the USSR put the Gorbachev administration under intense pressure, and eventually led to the dissolution of the Union, a process which then triggered the evaporation of the Soviet Government, and all Soviet structures, and hailed in an unstable era for Russia (under Boris Yeltsin), as well as for the other successor states.

In comparison, British politics in the 1950s and 1960s look remarkably peaceful and stable. Yet, the extent to which Britain changed in those two decades is even now, often not fully appreciated. The crucial period between the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 Sterling Crisis was the time when Britain – not through choice but as a result of *force majeure* – abandoned its role as a global military and political power. This was not a seamless exercise, but a painful one, and as this thesis has argued, not without its dishonourable moments. British institutions were under great stress, but in the end, the British state proved more flexible, and consequently more resilient.

[716] Horne, 1996, p 4

(2) Unusual Constitutional Arrangements and Political linkages with the metropole created an opportunity for those who wanted to linger.

Some British politicians and officials used the nebulous status of Britain's territories in Arabia to linger, and delay as much as possible the process of decolonisation that Britain was pursuing in the rest of its global possessions.

Whilst most of British Arabia was part of the informal empire, Algeria was formally not part of the French empire at all. Instead, from 1848 onwards, Algeria was governed as *departments* of metropolitan France – three, until 1955 when Bone was added, and a much larger number after 1958 as France resorted to its own constitutional summersaults to secure a lasting privileged position in North Africa. This situation justified the French government's decision to adopt a very different approach to Algeria, than to the rest of the empire – even to neighbouring Tunisia and Morocco – excluding full independence as an option.

Similarly, the constitutional organisation of the Soviet Union, under the intense pressures triggered by glasnost and perestroika, not only brought about the collapse of the Union, but in turn provided the metropole an opportunity to fight back and try to reclaim some of what had been lost. The USSR had a multi-tiered and hierarchical constitutional system with 15 Union republics, 20 autonomous republics, and 8 autonomous oblasts.[717] Despite the fact that Georgia was one of the smallest of the Union Republics, it had within it the highest number of sub-territorial units of all the Union republics except Russia itself – two Autonomous republics: Abkhazia and Adjara; and one Autonomous oblast, South Ossetia. In all three, Russia was able to work through local proxies, initially as a means to manipulate Georgia, and eventually to force a full secession of two of them.

Thus, in Algeria and Georgia also, the constitutional and formal political arrangements with the metropole created an opportunity for things to be done differently.

[717] There were also 10 autonomous Okrugs within the framework of the Russian SFSR, but none in the other 14 Soviet Republics.

(3) An accentuated role for personalities.

In Chapter 2, the important role of personalities in defining events in Britain's possessions in Arabia, particularly that of key men on the spot, such as Luce and Trevaskis, has been examined. In Aden, a senior British Political Officer, Robin Young, contemplated staging a coup[718]. In France, a de facto coup d'état brought about the collapse of the fourth republic in 1958. In French Algeria, Marcel-Edmund Naegalan, a stalwart of the *Parti Socialiste*, held the position of Governor-General from 1948-1951, at a time when events in Algeria could still be steered away from violence into negotiations. Like Trevaskis – even if the two were on the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum – Naegalan approached his task with Messianic fervour, seeing the dual threat of separatism and communism as an existential threat to France that had to be resisted, be it by election fraud or by heavy handed policing. But soon political confusion in France resulted in an even more accentuated role for personalities, when individuals felt they were no longer obliged to obey the normal chain of command, leading up to a de facto coup in 1958.

In the last years of the USSR, and immediately after its collapse, there was a power vacuum in both the metropolitan centre and the periphery. Of the two institutions that held the USSR together – the Communist Party and the Soviet Army – the Party was greatly weakened by Gorbachev's policies, leaving the Army as the sole guarantor of Soviet unity. In Baku in 1988, the Head of the Soviet Interior Ministry Troops in Azerbaijan could declare that in the absence of any other party or government representative he was 'God, Tsar and military chief'[719].' The use of army tanks to quash a peaceful demonstration by unarmed civilians in Tbilisi, on 9 April 1989, marked the turning point in Georgia-Russia relations. The decision was taken by Colonel-General Igor Rodionov[720], without reference either to the

[718] Hinchcliffe, in Hinchcliffe et al (2013), p159.

[719] Lebed (1998), page 89.

[720] Rodionov was from May 1988 to August 1989 the Commander of the Transcaucasus Military District, one of the most prestigious Soviet Army Commands, with its headquarters in Tbilisi. In 1996 he was

republican leadership in Tbilisi, or the Central Government in Moscow.[721] It reflected a disquiet in the Soviet Army, and amongst metropolitan elites, about the policies of the politicians in charge. The political confusion in Moscow created both a reason, and an opportunity, to do things differently, to act without orders, and in some cases even to disobey orders. The Moscow coup in August 1991 was the most dramatic expression of these concerns, but was far from being the only.

(4) Perceived, in some instances exaggerated, importance of the territories, strategically and economically, provided the justification.

The previous chapters have shown how an inflated perception of the importance of the Aden base had determined British policy towards South Arabia, and how this was linked to a perception that British economic interests in the Persian Gulf could only be safeguarded through military power. These assumptions provided a justification for costly, and often controversial decisions. This was where Britain was to make its last stand. Certainly a similar thinking coloured the view of French decision-makers *vis-à-vis* Algeria. Two factors contributed to this – the presence of a large number of white settlers, the *pieds-noir*, and the newly discovered oil wealth of the Algerian Sahara[722]. As was the case with Britain when considering the issue of the white settlers in Kenya and Central Africa, and the importance of Gulf oil, so in France each one of these factors on its own would have been of huge impact and significance. Taken together they created an unquestionable justification, which had deep resonance amongst the French elite and public, enabling a costly government response in moral, as well as financial terms. But one perhaps needs to look beyond the tangible to

appointed Defence Minister of Russia and served until 1999. He has since been a hardline member of the Russian Duma.

[721] From interview with Jumber Patiashvili, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia (1986-90) in Tbilisi in June 2001.

[722] Horne (1996) underplays the importance of the latter, but Kettle (1993) says that the chance discovery of oil in the Sahara 'was a wildly exciting event, which made Algeria seem really worth fighting for', (p xii).

understand some of the emotions and decisions[723]. As Evans says, 'The Fourth Republic did not want to relinquish sovereignty. Algeria was too important for the recovery of national self-esteem after occupation'.[724] And so like Trevaskis' refusal to recognise al-Asnag as a constructive partner in negotiations, the French Socialist government decided not to engage with moderate leaders like Ferhat Abbas, and hardline but pragmatic leaders like Messali Hadji, thus allowing the ground to be occupied by those who saw salvation only in a violent confrontation with French rule.[725]

Similarly, for the Russians in the early 1990s, the loss of Georgia, appeared in their perception, more serious and significant than the loss of the depth of Central Asia, or that of the strategic edge that had been provided by the Red Army's presence in Eastern Germany. This can partly be explained by Russian long-held view of the Caucasus as Russia's soft underbelly. This meant that the Black Sea Ports of Sukhumi, Batumi and Ochamchire; the huge special forces airbase of Gudauta, (that was also designated as an alternative base for the Soviet space programme), and control over the Caucasus Mountain Passes, such as the Roki Tunnel, were considered a life and death issue for Russia, even though in strategic terms, in 1992, they probably were not. Russian historian Sergei Markedonov says that 'since the first days of its existence as an independent state Russia pointed out the importance of the South Caucasus as an area crucial for its priority of strategic interests.' He adds that Moscow's perseverance to preserve its domination over this part of the post-Soviet area is perplexing.'[726]

Furthermore the interest, as with the other two cases, was not solely strategic. The call of the Caucasus, immortalised in Lermontov's writings had penetrated the Russian soul. It is

[723] Naegalan, back in France, in a front page article in the socialist daily Le Populaire on 13 December 1954, stated 'To lose North Africa… would be to lose in quick succession all of Africa, then the French Union, it would make France fall to the level of a second-rate power, and even a vassal power. It is not only our prestige that is at stake, but also our national independence.'

[724] Evans (2012), p112.

[725] Ibid.

[726] Markedonov (2009), p 11.

also not to be underestimated that the Georgian Black Sea Coast was a Russian playground, especially for the elites. From the "Sukhumi Sanitorium", to the bizarrely named "Hotel of the 16th Congress" near Gagra, Abkhazia was the place where the Russian elite, especially the military elite, took their families for rest and recreation.

(5) The manipulation of local elites was the tool of choice in the endeavour to secure a lasting privileged position in the post imperial world.

The manipulation of local elites was used by Britain, unsuccessfully in South Arabia, and successfully in the Gulf to manage the process of transition at the end of empire. As the end came closer the process intensified, friends were made, and dropped, at great speed, and some who had served their purpose loyally for a long time, suddenly became an obstacle and needed to be replaced.

In Algeria, France adopted a somewhat different approach. The pieds noirs were always suspicious of government's efforts to develop an intermediary class, seeing this as a threat to their own position. This does not mean, however, that the process was not ongoing. By the end of the 19th century France had destroyed the great traditional families of Algeria because they were considered to be the forces of resistance. In 1894, the Governor-General, Jules Cambon, complained to the Senate in Paris:

> We did not realise that in suppressing the forces of resistance in this fashion, we were also suppressing our means of action. The result is that we are today confronted by a sort of human dust on which we have no influence and in which movements take place which are to us unknown.[727]

In place, France, on paper tried a policy of assimilation that was supposed to empower the Muslims of Algeria and turn them into Frenchmen. By 1936, after seventy five years of "assimilation" less than two and a half thousand Muslims had acquired French citizenship. Instead, France ruled through a corrupt class of local petty officials – the Caids and the Cadis

[727] Horne (2006), p 37.

– often dubbed by young nationalists as the *Beni-oui-oui,*[728] who became a symbol of hate rather than a symbol of respect. The term was also used for the Muslims that were catapulted to the French National Assembly as a result of election fraud.[729] Election fraud became an important tool for French tactics in Algeria. After serving as Governor-General Jacques Soustelle spoke in contempt about these pseudo-Deputies 'put in office thanks to electoral fraud, most often illiterate and frequently dishonest, representing nothing and nobody…Few mistakes have been more tragic than that which consisted in distorting our own laws to bring into prominence discredited personalities without any intellectual or moral value'.[730]

The relationship between Soviet Russia and the Georgian intellectual and artistic elites bears some of the hallmarks of the mutual fascination between British officialdom and the Sheikhly families of Arabia. It was in the end however, first and foremost a relationship of mutual convenience. As early as March 1921, Lenin had instructed that there should be 'a special policy of concessions towards the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders' and that 'the internal and international situation of Georgia demands from the Georgian communists, not the application of the Russian pattern but the skilful and flexible creation of a distinctive tactic based on the greatest compliance with all kinds of petty-bourgeois elements.'[731] Within a decade the policy had been fine-tuned. In return for Georgian loyalty to the Soviet state – important not only for national cohesion, but also because Georgia was very much a front-line State defending the Russian underbelly – the Georgians would be treated as a privileged nationality – allowed to have Georgian as an official language at the Republican level, on par with Russian, and allowed to pursue their own sub-imperial designs in Abkhazia, Adjara and

[728] Ibid, p35.
[729] Kettle (1993), p33.
[730] Jacques Soustelle, quoted by Kettle (1993), p 33.
[731] Telegram of V.I. Lenin to Sergio Orjonikidze, head of the Kavburo in Baku 2 March 1921. (Suny, 1994, p211).

South Ossetia, within the broader framework of *korenizatsiia*.[732] Georgian artistic expression was allowed to flourish in an otherwise tightly controlled Soviet cultural space. Georgia was one of the most prosperous of the Soviet republics, and in return Georgians had a higher than average membership of the Communist Party. 9th April 1989 destroyed this idyllic world, and whilst the process had been under strain before, this was a dramatic turning point. With the unwritten pact broken, the Russians changed sides, and started supporting the elites of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, encouraging and arming them and mentoring them towards eventual secession.

(6) **Informal networks connecting key players – in the metropole, amongst the men of the spot, and from among local leaders – played a crucial role in decision-making, and networks from among these three constituencies worked in parallel, and sometimes in contradiction, with the established formal channels.**

In France and in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, and USSR/Russia in the 1980s and 1990s tightly knit groups of elites controlled most leverages of power in the metropole, and provided the men on the spot. The vast majority of those occupying senior positions in the British system, both at home and overseas, went to the same schools and universities (all two of them)[733]. A second, even narrower filter, reduced considerably the choice of those who

[732] A policy for empowering nationalities within the USSR based on the twin policies of promoting national language and creating national elites. Suny and Martin (2001), p5, define it as 'indigenization', According to Broers (2004) p82, "the Soviet incorporation of national elites was predicated on the principle of enhanced mobility for titular elites at the sub state level. The unrestricted mobility of local elites through dedicated titular institutions within designated homelands for the purposes of self administration, (if not rule), was a key premise of the Soviet policy of korenizatsiia (indigenisation), and the Soviet social contract as a whole." However this surge towards building up the nationalities went against the other instincts of the Soviet state, which were to channel all power to a narrow centralised control exercised through the Communist Party, and specifically through its central leadership in Moscow. It also contradicted the internationalist vision of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Throughout the existence of the Soviet Union these contradictions were to cause problems for the Soviet system, on the one hand creating a system with all the hallmarks of empire, on the other creating a façade of a multi-ethnic state that was credible enough for most political scientists to refrain from describing the USSR as an empire for the time that it existed.

[733] In the period 1961-64, only one in eight recruits the Foreign Office were not Oxbridge graduates. Stewart (1980), p 146.

were usually deployed in Arabia in the same period to Arabists – green cadets from MECAS, or veterans from the Sudan Civil Service, and they came often with their set orientalist views of Arabs and Arab societies which tended to see traditional rulers as the only interlocutors. Other networks, involving for example trade unionists became increasingly relevant in the later years, but never achieved the same importance and impact as the former.

In the Soviet Union the biggest elite network was the communist party, but by the end of the 1980s this was a diluted and moribund organisation. Other networks within it were however more significant. North Ossetians, who traditionally played a significant role in the Soviet Army and occupied high positions in it, used informal networks to secure support, and crucial military supplies, for South Ossetian secessionists in the 1991/92 conflict. Similarly, shady business interests that emerged during the time of *Perestroika* connected power figures, such as the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, with the strongman in the Adjara Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze. At a time when the central government in Moscow was very weak, these informal networks could wield great influence on policy, and often determine the course of events on the ground.

(7) All empires blamed outsiders for their troubles.

The British obsession with Nasser has been discussed in this thesis. It similarly coloured the French view of the situation in Algeria, where Nasser was blamed for the 'All Saints Day' uprising in 1954, and everything else that followed. In fact FLN leaders had found the Egyptians stingy and unresponsive when they asked for arms and money. Even the propaganda of *Sawt el Arab* was often less important for what it actually said, and more as an expression of unity with the wider struggle. This tendency to blame others can also be seen in the Georgian situation. The Russians blamed Western countries for encouraging Georgian nationalist chauvinism; in turn the Georgians blamed the Russians for fuelling separatist tendencies amongst the Abkhaz and the Ossetians. In all three circumstances some external

meddling existed, but most problems were home grown, and that is where solutions also needed to be looked for.

(8) For politicians the end of empire can be a messy business, for many who are left behind, it is deadly.

In Aden, Algeria and Georgia the British, French and Russian empires came to a dramatic end. Aden never had a settler population, so the evacuation at the end was related mainly to military personnel and their dependants, but even this proved to be a major logistical operation involving tens of thousands of people and hundreds of RAF flights. Those local people who were perceived as collaborationists faced a difficult future. Many, including those amongst the Sultans and their families who did not have the good sense to leave when they could, were killed or imprisoned. Yet the numbers were miniscule when compared with what happened in Algeria. Here a large settler community escaped to France in chaos and confusion. They were the lucky ones. Those Muslims who had collaborated with the French where in most part left behind, often to be summarily executed by lynch mobs, or in retribution. In Abkhazia, tens of thousands of Georgians had to walk to safety, often through difficult mountain terrain, once the Georgian resistance collapsed. Many perished on the way. Several hundred thousand people were displaced. Few remember them for human costs, and are often relegated to a secondary role in the history of "end of empire".

A final word.

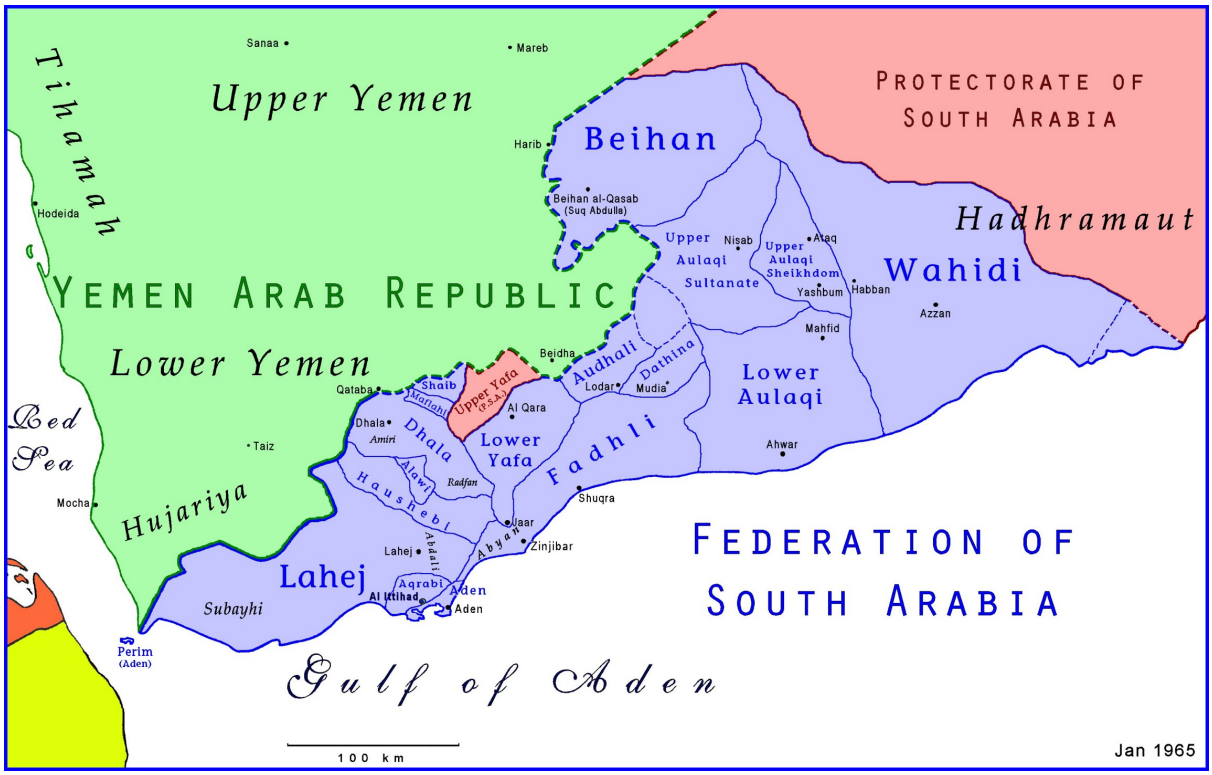
These reflections offer us food for thought, but it is perhaps too early to speak about patterns in imperial retreat in a broad-enough sense that will allow us to deduce conclusive observations. The dust has hardly settled down from the process of ending the three empires – some argue that the process itself may not even be finished yet: look for example at the Russian actions in Georgia in 2008, and in Ukraine in 2014; or Britain's continued

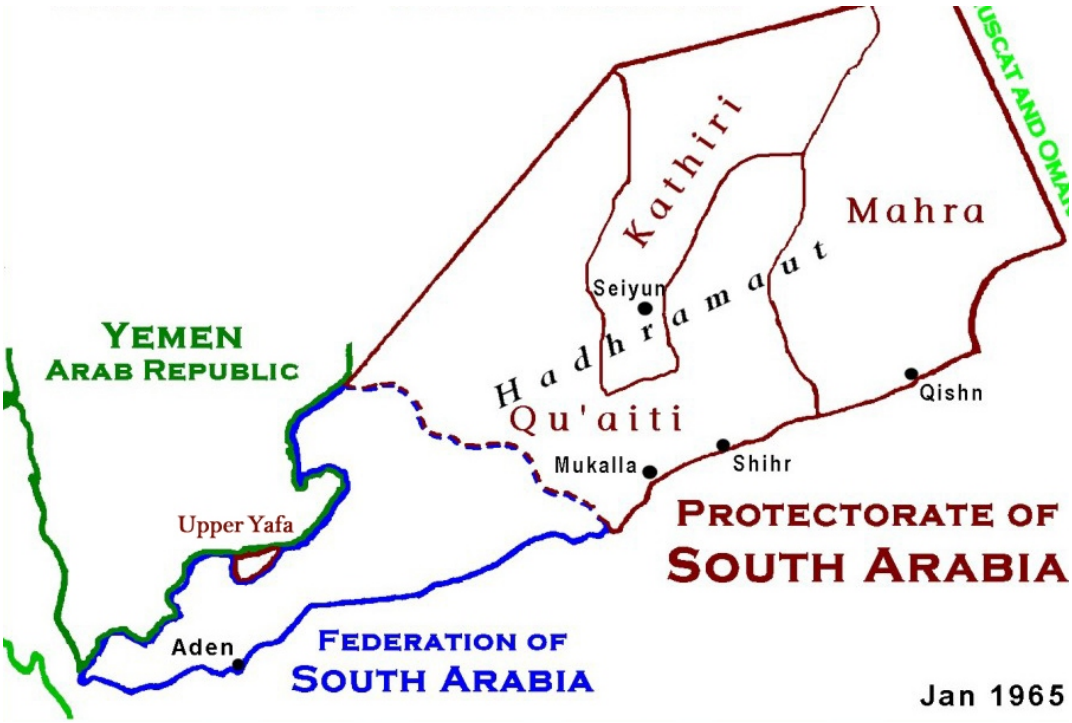
entanglement with Arab politics, and its role in the wars in the Gulf in 1991/2 and 2003; or France's continued, quasi-colonial, presence in parts of Africa.

This thesis has highlighted some of the complexities involved in "end of empire" processes: the opportunities and the pitfalls that the processes themselves create; the roles individuals play in shaping events and policies at moments when the political system in the metropole seems to be at its weakest (and their limitations), and how they managed change – resisting change, riding on its wave, or being themselves agents for change; and the similarities created by specific conditions that seem to be common across the three large European empires that formally ended in the latter half of the 20th century.

The process of change, though, is often cyclical. There is, even if for a short time, a "re-freezing", but often not for long, for the desire for change is almost a constant human aspiration. The post-imperial order in the former British possessions on the Arabian Peninsula was determined by the events and outcomes discussed in this thesis, to become what remains as yet the present order. In many ways, this order is now once again under question, and a period of "defreezing" may follow to allow the next phase of change to happen. This is perhaps then, a good time to learn from the lessons that the history of the British exit from Arabia in the period 1951-72 teaches us.

Appendix 1. Maps of South Arabia





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