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SPECIAL ISSUE

Failure and Success in State Formation: British Policy towards the Federation of South Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

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From the second half of the nineteenth century, amalgamating contiguous territories had become a standard feature of British imperial policy whether in Canada, Australia, or South Africa. While these experiments were largely successful, neutralizing radical nationalism while facilitating the maintenance of close ties with Britain, similar attempts at nation-building in the non-European parts of the empire were markedly less so. Failed federations in Central Africa, the West Indies, South-East Asia, and especially South Arabia after 1945 not surprisingly made Britain chary about adopting a policy of closer association for the states of the Lower Gulf. As the British Ambassador to Abu Dhabi recalled in 1972: 'federations have not proved to be durable and the British have earned themselves a dismal reputation recently as their architects'.¹

In the mid-1950s, the Governor of Aden, Sir Tom Hickinbotham, had championed the idea of rationalizing the disparate territories of the hinterland. His specific proposal centred on the creation, in the first instance, of two federations, one each in the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates. Hickinbotham envisaged that these developments would lay the foundations for the eventual federation of both Protectorates with Aden colony.² There was widespread scepticism in British policy-making circles about the applicability of Hickinbotham's scheme to the British-protected states of the Gulf. Typifying this attitude, Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf, Bernard Burrows, advised that 'The commotion caused by our proposals to federate the States of the Aden Protectorate should perhaps also be a warning against undue zeal in this direction at the present time.'³ In the Foreign Office there was general acceptance of Burrows' views on the impracticality of promoting a federation, one official going so far as to urge the eschewal of any "grand design" for the whole Persian Gulf'.⁴ The sagacity of this approach was underscored by events in southern Arabia.

Towards the beginning of 1958, Hickinbotham's successor, Sir William Luce, revived the federal idea, insisting that 'federation now offers the best hope of retaining our influence in the Protectorate for a number of years to come, and thus enable constitutional development to self-government and self-determination to proceed as peacefully as possible'.⁵ The Secretary of State for Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, subsequently informed his Cabinet colleagues that leading Rulers in the Western Aden Protectorate had expressed a willingness to establish a federation in order to 'make the defence of their States against Yemeni attacks more effective and to offer their people a better future than they can offer to them individually'.⁶ Lennox-Boyd warned that if Britain failed to respond to this initiative there was a risk that the Rulers would make peace with Yemen or look to Cairo for support with the result that the threat to Aden colony would 'at once become imminent'.⁷ The Cabinet was persuaded by Lennox-Boyd's arguments and authorized him to tell the Rulers that HMG favoured the formation of a federation in the Western Aden Protectorate.⁸ The position of the British colony of Aden, however, was left unresolved.

At the beginning of 1961, the Supreme Council of the new federation impressed upon the Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, its wish to see Aden incorporated into the federal structure on the grounds that 'one Government was essential if a strong and friendly entity was to be created'.⁹ Shortly after this encounter, Sir Charles Johnston, who had recently taken over from Sir William Luce, admitted that there was 'no doubt whatever' that a referendum held in Aden would produce a 'heavy majority' against either any form of merger with the federation or any continuation of the connection with Britain.¹⁰ This led him to conclude that 'HMG are thus faced with a difficult choice: we can stick to our democratic principles and procedures, and in that case must expect to lose our strategic facilities; or we can keep our strategic facilities, in which case we must accept some deviation from our principles.'¹¹ Responding to Johnston's missive, Assistant Secretary at the Colonial Office I. B. Watt asserted that while it was premature to lay down the form which the merger between Aden and the federation should take, 'Her Majesty's Government regard it as essential that whatever the form may be, our defence facilities shall not, in the Colony or in the Protectorate, be any the less assured'.¹² In a similar vein, the Foreign Office bluntly declared:

Our aim is to retain the British position in Aden with full use of the base facilities for as long as possible. We believe that the promotion of closer association between the Colony and Protectorate is the best way to achieve this aim with the continued support

of our friends in the area, namely the moderates in the Colony and the traditional Rulers in the Protectorate.¹³

In early October 1961, Johnston reported that the moderate Aden politician, Hasan Ali Bayoomi, not only enjoyed majority support in the colony's Legislative Council, but was also prepared to back amalgamation with the federation.¹⁴ Johnston subsequently argued in favour of merger before elections in the Colony for fear that they might produce a majority hostile to this initiative. 'After all,' he insisted, 'merger is in the colony's best interest and it would be irresponsible of us to make its realisation dependent on the hazards of Arabian democracy.'¹⁵ Consequently, elections were postponed until after the merger had been concluded.¹⁶

The incorporation of Aden colony into the British-sponsored federation of South Arabian states in January 1963 was an unhappy constitutional experiment. In keeping with other British attempts at closer association in the era of decolonization, the South Arabian Federation proved to be a chronically unstable structure. As the Governor of Aden, Sir Charles Johnston, had been forced to concede: 'the entry of Aden into the Federation is not an easy matter to provide for. It is a bringing together not only of urban and rural, but of different centuries as well: modern Glasgow, say, and the 18th century highlands.'¹⁷ In his memoirs, former Labour Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, referred to the new constitutional structure as a 'misbegotten Federation ... controlled by the backward sheikhs from the protectorates ... whose main occupation was fighting each other'.¹⁸ Revolution and civil war in neighbouring Yemen, moreover, merely contributed to the instability, not least due to the intervention of Britain's inveterate foe, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, on the side of the Yemeni republicans. Johnston prophetically warned that 'So far, the problems of South Arabia have been mainly parochial ones and it has been spared the full blast of Arab nationalism. If we are now to be faced with a pro-Nasser republic in the Yemen this situation will be radically changed and the Nationalist winds will begin to howl here. The threat to the Aden base may well be serious.'¹⁹

A little over a year after the merger, Britain's High Commissioner for Aden, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, gloomily remarked: 'Our failure to build up the Federation as a serious contender for the loyalty of its inhabitants during the past year has resulted in a steady and, recently, rapid corrosion of public confidence in the face of the increasing pressure from the U.A.R./Y.A.R.²⁰ and their allies'.²¹ Indeed, on 14 October 1963 the National Liberation Front (NFL), backed by the Yemen Arab Republic, launched an armed struggle against the British.²²

Trevaskis concluded: 'since the "man in the street" now believes a Nasserite Y.A.R. is firmly established in the Yemen and since, from lack of funds and unduly obtrusive British control, the Federation has failed to make a real impact as an effective Arab Government with a potential for independence, there is a growing tendency to climb on the Nasserite Y.A.R. bandwagon'.²³ Conservative Prime Minister Sir Alec-Douglas-Home was forced to concede that Britain had not yet succeeded in making its presence 'worthwhile to the local inhabitants'.²⁴ Writing to Denis Healey in November 1964, the Political Officer in the state of Dhala, Hugh Walker, warned that the British-sponsored Federation would fail unless it had the backing of the people. 'Here, in Aden State and the Protectorate,' he stated bluntly, 'it has not.'²⁵

The problems associated with winning the hearts and minds of local people were recognized by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Commonwealth Relations and Colonies, Lord Beswick. Reflecting on a visit to South Arabia in late 1965, he observed that 'one factor which struck forcibly was the mounting cost of trying to establish a new Federation out of the underdeveloped states'.²⁶ Beswick went on to confess that he seriously doubted whether 'any proper assessment was made of the economic costs' when the Federation was first accepted as a means of buttressing the British base in Aden.²⁷

To make matters worse for the British, the burgeoning security problems meant that Aden could not play the role assigned to it of projecting British power and preserving British influence in the wider region. As Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, emphasized in August 1965: 'we at present had five battalions in Aden which were engaged in maintaining internal security in South Arabia and protecting the Base itself, so that they were not in practice available as a reserve for use elsewhere in the area'.²⁸ J. O. Wright (Private Secretary to the Prime Minister) had already remarked that 'we may be getting into a vicious circle in which we are in Aden in order to fulfil commitments elsewhere but cannot fulfil them because we need to protect Aden'.²⁹ Disenchantment in London with Britain's continuing presence in South Arabia was epitomized by Under-Secretary supervising Middle Eastern affairs at the Foreign Office, G. G. Arthur's, suggestion that 'Maybe we should just cut our losses and leave, as we left Burma, concentrating on our interests elsewhere, as in the Gulf. There seems little point in remaining in insufficient force to use Aden as a base, yet enough to purchase all the odium and do all the dirty work.'³⁰

In the course of the defence studies review conducted in Whitehall and at Westminster towards the end of 1965, the Cabinet Official Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, drawing lessons from the seemingly intractable 'confrontation' in which Britain had become embroiled with Indonesia following the formation of the British-backed state of Malaysia in 1963, declared: 'We should not be wise to undertake the defence of any part of South Arabia after independence.'³¹ On 24 November 1965, the Committee's ministerial counterpart agreed that 'when South Arabia became independent in 1967 or 1968 we should not maintain any obligations to, or defensive facilities or forces in, Aden or the South Arabian Federation'.³² In its briefs for Prime Minister Harold Wilson's discussions in Washington with Lyndon Johnson in December 1965, the Foreign Office asserted:

we do not believe that we shall be able to maintain a base at Aden once South Arabia is independent, since we could only do so at the prohibitive price of a commitment to defend South Arabia. Even in that case the situation in Aden would most likely make the base untenable; at best we should be defending South Arabia to maintain a base which we could not use for any other purpose.³³

While admitting that the British approach to South Arabia had 'a nasty whiff of the Palestine scuttle about it', the Head of the FO's United Nations (Political) Department, Sam Falle, pragmatically recorded that 'it seems better to make an honest break now rather than persist in setting up a Federation, which we know is going to fall to bits'.³⁴

When British plans were relayed to the Federal Council in February 1966, the federal finance minister, Sheikh Mohamed Farid al-Aulaqi, declared that he and his fellow Rulers were 'shattered'.³⁵ He went on to state that 'they could not bring themselves to believe that Britain could have acted in such a "disgraceful" fashion towards people who had withstood the enmity of the Arab world through standing by her'.³⁶ In slightly more measured tones, the chairman of the Federation's Supreme Council, Sultan Saleh bin Hussein al-Audhali, confessed that he and his colleagues 'could not resist a feeling of abandonment'.³⁷

Despite the protests of the Federal Rulers, however, the 1966 White Paper on Defence carried the British decision to abandon the Aden base at the time of the independence of South Arabia which had already been set for no later than 1968.³⁸ With considerable justification, John T. Ducker, who served in the British Overseas Civil Service in Aden and South Arabia in the 1960s, has argued that 'The impact on the Federal government of the Defence White Paper was fatal. In particular, the effect of the decision on the Aden base on

the Egyptian government was that they now knew that they had only to sit out the period until the British withdrew from Aden for them to emerge victorious from their struggle to prevent the emergence of a South Arabian state supported by Britain.³⁹ Equally, J. B. Kelly contended that 'The fatal blow at the Federation of South Arabia was struck by the statement on defence policy of February 1966, which gave full rein to the Labour party's aversion to residual imperial responsibilities and overseas commitments'.⁴⁰ Asher Orkaby, although writing in somewhat more measured tones, has also given weight to the 1966 White Paper, stressing that it prompted Nasser to cancel plans to pull his troops out of Yemen, to continue his attack on the Federation and sponsorship of terrorism in Aden, and to 'exploit the withdrawal to the fullest in order to make it look like a defeat for the British'.⁴¹ Moreover, the former commander of the Federal Regular Army, James Lunt, memorably remarked that the British decision 'confounded all their friends and delighted all their enemies in South Arabia; it was like giving burglars advance notice of one's intention to be away from home. Within months the Egyptian troop strength had been increased once more to 60, 000'.⁴²

The fragility of the South Arabian Federation was cruelly exposed by the mutiny of the Federal army on 20 June 1967.⁴³ The last British High Commissioner in South Arabia, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, informed Foreign Secretary George Brown that 'The situation was transformed on 20 June, when the South Arabian Forces which it had been hoped would hold at least until we left, were shown to be an unreliable force liable to turn against each other for tribal reasons or against us in the atmosphere left by the Israeli war,⁴⁴ and that the British Commander as a result was not longer in effective command'.⁴⁵ The determination to depart was reinforced by the collapse of the Federation in the second half of 1967 as a result of the military campaign conducted by the National Liberation Front. By August, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan was forced to concede that 'The situation is deteriorating rapidly on a steepening curve'.⁴⁶ He insisted that Britain's primary objective was 'the orderly withdrawal of our Government and Forces', adding that 'we must not compromise this aim'.⁴⁷ With similar cold logic, George Brown informed his Cabinet colleagues that the collapse of the Federal government dictated that 'the only course we can follow is to leave the Arabs to settle their own differences'.⁴⁸

In the light of the worsening conditions in South Arabia, a special Cabinet meeting was convened on 30 October to authorize Britain's early departure from the area.⁴⁹ On 29 November the last British forces left Aden nearly 130 years after their first arrival. A day later,

Aden and the Protectorates were taken over by the NLF which subsequently formed the Marxist People's Republic of South Yemen. The journalist and historian Brian Lapping has aptly remarked that 'The departure of the British from Aden was certainly the worst shambles in the End of Empire, the successor regime the most completely opposed to all the British had stood for.'⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Andrew Mumford has concluded that 'The vacuum in South Arabia was filled by the political and paramilitary forces the British had spent five years covertly and overtly attempting to quash.'⁵¹ Nevertheless, by the time of departure, Aden and South Arabia were increasingly seen as a liability by British statesmen. Reflecting the views of many of his colleagues, Labour Cabinet Minister Richard Crossman wrote in his diary:

That the regime ... should have been overthrown by terrorists and has forced our speedy withdrawal is nothing but good fortune. It now looks as though we shall get out of Aden without losing a British soldier, chaos will rule soon after we've gone, and there'll be one major commitment cut - thank God.⁵²

Nevertheless, when it came to pursuing convergence among the British-protected states of the Lower Gulf, British decision-makers consciously sought to avoid some of the pitfalls which had been encountered in South Arabia.

The deposition of the highly conservative ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Shakhbut, by his more progressive brother, Sheikh Zaid, in August 1966⁵³ appeared to presage a push towards the closer association of the British-protected states of the Lower Gulf. Certainly Zaid sought to build bridges with the Rulers of Dubai and Qatar, visiting their states towards the end of the year. The bitter experience of failed attempts to fuse the flotsam of empire together elsewhere, however, served to erode Britain's attachment to the federal idea.

Referring to the possibility of a federation of Gulf States, the Head of the FO's United Nations (Political) Department, Sam Falle, expostulated: 'This proposal fills me with despair and it seems to me that we are creating yet another albatross as a worthy successor to the ill-starred Aden Federation and others elsewhere in the world.'⁵⁴ He went on to assert that the 'creation of a lovely new neo-colonialist federation would be manna from heaven for our enemies who would enjoy themselves inordinately at our expense.'⁵⁵ Moreover, the Head of the Arabian Department, T. F. Brenchley, admitted: 'I certainly do not think that we should force federation through against local opposition as was done in South Arabia.'⁵⁶

Possibly drawing on his South Arabian experience, Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir William Luce, studiously avoided taking the initiative in the creation of a league or

association of Gulf states, arguing that it was a question which the Rulers would have to handle 'in their own way and in their own time'.⁵⁷ He went on to insist that 'We want co-operation between the Gulf States to gain its own momentum and not to depend indefinitely on constant prodding from us.'⁵⁸ The furthest Luce was prepared to go was to advocate 'Gulf solidarity', in which Saudi Arabia would in future act as an external guarantor for the continuing autonomous existence of the Gulf States.⁵⁹ Reviewing the prospects for closer association of the Lower Gulf Sheikhdoms in 1966 on the eve of his retirement, Luce admitted that 'our recent experiences with federations elsewhere in the world have dampened our own enthusiasm for this particular solution'.⁶⁰ In a similar vein, P. R. Spendlove of the FCO's Commonwealth Policy and Planning Department observed that 'our experience in Asia and Africa in trying to do this leads one to suspect that in so far as the idea of fusing the Sheikhdoms is concerned the suggestion is self-deceiving rather than a practicable proposition'.⁶¹ Reflecting in mid-1967 on British policy towards the Lower Gulf, moreover, the Cabinet Official Committee on Defence and Oversea Policy noted that the creation of a single political unit had been 'slow and difficult'.⁶² Even interim measures such as the creation of a single currency had foundered, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain setting up one currency, Qatar and the Northern Trucial States another. The Committee concluded that 'recent British experience elsewhere suggests that political association between reluctant units is an unsatisfactory feature of the decolonisation process. The West Indies, Malaysia, Nigeria, Central Africa and South Arabia are not the most encouraging of precedents.'⁶³

In the aftermath of Britain's decision, announced in early 1968, to quit the Gulf by 1971, Brenchley's successor as Head of the FCO's Arabian Department, M. S. Weir, insisted that there could be 'no question of trying, or even being thought to be trying, to promote another "Whitehall Federation" on the lines of South Arabia'.⁶⁴ Commenting on the prospects of federating all nine British protected-states of the Lower Gulf before Britain's departure, the Political Agent in Bahrain, A. D. Parsons, cautioned against giving the new structure 'the kiss of death by producing British expert writers of constitutions, etc'.⁶⁵ During a visit to the Lower Gulf in late 1968, the former High Commissioner of the South Arabian Federation, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, did little to conceal his scepticism towards the creation of a Union of Arab Emirates, justifying this position with reference to the failure of the federal experiment in southern Arabia.⁶⁶ The new Head of the FCO's Arabian Department, D. J. McCarthy, produced a number of cogent arguments against more overt

and active backing by Britain for unity in the Lower Gulf. Quite apart from the fact that British intervention would undermine the credibility of union by giving it the appearance of an imperialist design, McCarthy pointed out that Britain's influence with the Rulers was 'steadily diminishing', and as such any success in overcoming their 'apathy and rivalries' would be necessarily limited.⁶⁷ On a purely practical level, he stressed that if Britain attempted to impose a union against the real aspirations and wishes of the Lower Gulf Rulers, it would in all likelihood disintegrate after British withdrawal.⁶⁸ Ruminating on the prospects for unity in the Lower Gulf, moreover, Britain's Political Resident there, Sir Stewart Crawford, counselled that 'Whichever way things go, we should seek to ensure that the decision is seen to be that of the Arab Governments concerned and not of our contriving'.⁶⁹

The perils of Britain taking a pro-active stance with respect to state-building in the Lower Gulf were graphically demonstrated during the October 1969 meeting of Rulers in Abu Dhabi. With the real prospect of the meeting breaking-up without agreement on the future of the Lower Gulf having been reached, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart insisted that 'we should not seem to have stood idly by when it threatened'.⁷⁰ The Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, C. J. Treadwell, was therefore authorized to intervene and stress the importance which HMG attached to the achievement of a union of Arab Emirates. Claiming that Treadwell's intrusion was unwarranted, the Rulers of Qatar and Ras al Khaimah walked out of the meeting, the latter maintaining that British advice amounted to 'dictation' to the Rulers which 'offended their Arab dignity'.⁷¹ Sheikh Zaid subsequently blamed Britain for 'encouraging the unity of such an odd assortment of peoples', an accusation British policy-makers were keen to avoid in future.⁷² No doubt chastened by the failure of the October 1969 meeting of Rulers, Michael Stewart reverted to the position that 'the will to unite must exist first among those concerned and cannot be imposed'.⁷³

Exemplifying Foreign Office attitudes, the head of the Arabian Department, A. A. Acland, drew attention to the fact that Britain's capacity to bring pressure to bear on the Gulf Rulers had always been 'rather less than it might appear'.⁷⁴ 'Recently', he added, 'it has been further limited by a new factor, the realisation by the Rulers that the decision to withdraw militarily by the end of 1971 is probably irreversible'.⁷⁵ In these circumstances, the Rulers sought, and took, British advice 'less and less'.⁷⁶ Even if Britain were in a position to force the Rulers into a union, Acland doubted the value of an imposed structure. 'A

successful Union which will survive our military withdrawal from the Gulf', he concluded, 'can only be brought about if the Rulers enter into it willingly with a genuine desire to make it work'.⁷⁷

The sagacity of this evaluation was underlined by the failure of the meeting of Deputy Rulers in October 1970 to reach agreement which, in effect, sounded the death-knell for closer association between all nine states of the Lower Gulf. Shortly after the collapse of the Deputy Rulers' meeting, Treadwell opined: 'We can now be really certain that the Union of the nine has failed and it can only be a matter of time before Bahrain declare themselves free to go their own way'.⁷⁸ In a similar vein, the Foreign Secretary, Alec Douglas-Home, concluded that 'there is no further prospect of progress with a union of nine'.⁷⁹ At the conference of Political Agents in November 1970, it was agreed, if only because of the differences between Bahrain and Qatar, that a union of nine 'could be excluded as a real possibility'.⁸⁰ Although Sheikh Zaid clung vainly to a union of the nine, the Rulers of Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras al Khaimah regarded this concept as 'dead'.⁸¹ The Bahrainis, who proved resistant to compromise, were equally sceptical about the prospects for the UAE. 'They are likely', prophesied the British Political Agent in Manama, 'to continue their move towards separate independence, while publicly framing their policy to allow as far as possible for various Arab and Iranian susceptibilities and for protestations of willingness to join a "proper" Union whenever it might come into being'.⁸² Indeed, while Bahraini faith in the UAE had evidently evaporated, there was a strong concern to avoid incurring the blame for its demise.⁸³

With Bahrain sceptical about union, and Qatar assuming the status of a pariah, the other Gulf States (with the exception of Ras al Khaimah) proclaimed the formation of the United Arab Emirates on 18 July 1971. Shortly after this announcement, first Bahrain and then Qatar declared their intention to seek separate statehood and membership of the United Nations. In the short term, these outcomes appeared to increase instability in the Lower Gulf.

Against the backdrop of the Iranian occupation of the disputed Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs on the eve of Britain's departure, riots broke out in Ras al Khaimah and Sharjah. With feelings running high, the Deputy Ruler of Sharjah was wounded by an unidentified gunman.⁸⁴ Exploiting the sense of confusion, the former Ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Saqr, led a coup attempt at the end of January 1972 in which his successor, Sheikh

Khalid, was killed.⁸⁵ To make matters worse, the Ruler of Ras al Khaimah was implicated in the Sharjah plot.⁸⁶ Although foiled by other members of the ruling family, the attempted coup was a clear manifestation of turbulence following the British withdrawal. Still reeling from events in Sharjah, the Lower Gulf was rocked by another coup, this time in Qatar.

On 22 February 1972, Doha radio reported that Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad had assumed the position of head of state and Amir of Qatar in place Sheikh Ahmed who was accused of being concerned only with realizing 'personal benefits at the expense of the homeland'.⁸⁷ Although Khalifah's seizure of power appeared to have the support of powerful elements, not least the ruling family and the army, his actions poisoned relations with the UAE. The former Ruler of Qatar's father-in-law, Sheikh Rashid of Dubai, was especially incensed.⁸⁸ So virulent did Rashid's criticisms become that Khalifah, fearing military action on the part of the UAE to restore Ahmed to power, felt it necessary to appeal to Saudi Arabia for support.⁸⁹ Khalifah also launched regular tirades against the UAE in general and Sheikhs Zaid and Rashid in particular. On one occasion, he accused the Union of being 'no Union at all', justifying his comments by pointing out that it was 'split by petty differences' and claiming 'Zaid had no authority to pull it together'.⁹⁰ On another, he told Prime Minister Edward Heath that relations between Zaid and Rashid were 'poor' and that the UAE was 'greatly weakened as a consequence'.⁹¹

Despite the subjective nature of Khalifah's critique, it did appear to have some basis in reality. Britain's Consul-General in Dubai, J. F. Walker, reported a groundswell of criticism among the Northern Trucial States of Abu Dhabi's 'management (or non-management) of Union affairs'.⁹² There was also dissatisfaction over the siting of government departments and the capital in Abu Dhabi itself. The former Political Agent and subsequently Britain's first Ambassador in Abu Dhabi, C. J. Treadwell, recorded gloomily that 'The UAE is a federation of seven disparate States controlled by ruling families whose one common characteristic is an inability to comprehend the meaning of modern political government'.⁹³ He also pointed out that, since Sheikhs Zaid and Rashid were the 'cornerstone of the Union', the UAE would be destroyed if they were ever to fall out.⁹⁴ Ominously, Treadwell noted that in temperament they were 'as different as chalk and cheese'.⁹⁵

While recognizing that the UAE stemmed from the decision in February 1968 of Zaid and Rashid to unite following Britain's withdrawal announcement, Treadwell claimed that 'without our guidance, coaxing, encouragement and plain interference, it would all have

come to nothing'.⁹⁶ In the three years of 'wrangling, inertia, equivocation, and skulduggery' which it took the Rulers to abandon a union of nine, asserted Treadwell, the British had done much to bring Zaid and Rashid together.⁹⁷ In this respect, Treadwell's insistence that the UAE was, in part, a 'British federation' is justified. Nevertheless, the two Rulers of the principal states had strong reasons for pushing through the concept of unity among the Trucial States. For Zaid, unity afforded him the opportunity to play a major role in the Gulf beyond the borders of Abu Dhabi, while Rashid, fearing Dubai's reduction to a mere enclave on the Trucial Coast, saw in co-operation with Zaid the possibility of moderating the Abu Dhabi Ruler's influence over the five smaller emirates.⁹⁸ As pragmatic men, moreover, both Zaid and Rashid recognized the impracticability, and indeed danger, of separate independence for these tiny states. Despite Zaid's determination to extend union authority and Rashid's equal resolution, especially following his assumption of the prime ministership in 1979, to resist the same,⁹⁹ the two men belied Treadwell's dire predictions, managing to preserve the basis for a working relationship. As early as 1973, the Bahraini Minister of Defence and Heir Apparent, Sheikh Hamad, confessed that 'what had surprised him was not the fragility of the union but the fact that it worked as well as it did'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, while its inception was undoubtedly tortured, the UAE, bolstered by oil wealth,¹⁰¹ proved to be a success story among the litany of British failures in closer association.

With the wrecks of numerous failed federal experiments to guide them, the British were extremely wary of any attempt to impose unity on the Gulf States. 'Our best course', Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker emphasized towards the end of 1964, 'will be to press on with building up common services for the Trucial States and not to come out openly for the time being with a formal plan for federation, which would be liable to arouse antagonisms and increase the difficulty of welding the area together'.¹⁰² Specifically drawing lessons from the disastrous South Arabian Federation, the Head of the Foreign Office's Aden Department, D. J. McCarthy, asserted: 'A structure over-dependent on British participation and support is no good. A structure, even if sounder, which appears to be bound to follow the political and administrative pattern which British practice normally involves is little better'.¹⁰³ Shortly before the formal withdrawal announcement was made, moreover, the Foreign Office warned that 'by trying to force the Rulers into an uncongenial mould we should probably cause more instability than we should save'.¹⁰⁴ At the beginning of May 1968, moreover, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart told the Saudi Minister of Defence,

Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, that 'Her Majesty's Government welcomed the move of the Gulf States towards closer co-operation, but considered it important that the Union of Arab Emirates should be, and should be seen to be, the creation of the Sheikhdoms themselves and not of Her Majesty's Government'.¹⁰⁵ Stewart added that 'Her Majesty's Government's policy was to back the Rulers' move towards closer association, not to drag them into it.'¹⁰⁶ In his final despatch before stepping down as Political Resident in July 1970, Sir Stewart Crawford pointed out that 'Britain is not in the Gulf as an imperial Power; the Protected States are not dependencies and as they have for long had their own systems of government, however imperfect, there is no question of our having, as in Aden and other colonies, to create them.'¹⁰⁷ Crawford also warned that 'Even if outside pressure compelled the Rulers to bring a federal union into being, I fear that it would later collapse when the stiffening provided by our presence was withdrawn'.¹⁰⁸

While Britain was a consistent supporter of bringing the small Gulf States together, the emergence of the United Arab Emirates from the seven Trucial States essentially derived from the initiative of Sheikhs Zaid of Abu Dhabi and Rashid of Dubai. In this sense, the United Arab Emirates in no real sense can be seen as either a neo-colonial creation of the British, or even an imposed constitutional arrangement along the lines of the South Arabian Federation, which, in turn, goes a long way to explaining its endurance and success. The abandonment of the notion of consent,¹⁰⁹ especially given the politically sophisticated environment of Aden, militated against the South Arabian Federation's chances of attracting local support and emerging as a stable structure. Even in the Colonial Office, which in the era of the 'wind of change' was sponsoring self-determination among dependent territories, there were qualms about British policy towards South Arabia. In October 1961, for instance, Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, H. T. Bourdillon, mused: 'To my mind the main point is that if we adopt the Governor's new proposals we shall, I fear, be throwing over too readily, for the sake of a deal between one of the leading Aden Colony moderates and the Federal Rulers, the principle of consent.'¹¹⁰ The leading Aden colony moderate to whom Bourdillon was referring was Hasan Ali Bayoomi. His death in June 1963 proved to be a major setback for the British.¹¹¹ The urban insurrection in Aden which broke out in 1963, coupled with the campaign waged by the NLF in the interior, created a degree of instability which undermined the federal project still further. Writing in 1977, the FCO recalled that 'The early leaders of the NLF planned not simply to bring about the withdrawal

of the British presence but to break down the entire tribal structure of the protectorates, destroy the Sultan system on which the South Arabian federation was being constructed and create a classless, disciplined society out of the ashes.¹¹²

However controversial and tortuous the emergence of the United Arab Emirates proved to be, its creation took place against a background of relative stability compared with the conditions of terror and armed conflict which characterized the political landscape in South Arabia. This undoubtedly contributed to the survival of the United Arab Emirates by comparison with the ignominious demise of the Federation of South Arabia. The fact that British decision-makers consciously sought to learn the lessons of failed federations elsewhere in the empire was arguably the major consideration in the endurance of the UAE though. As the former Political Agent in Bahrain, Anthony Parsons, recalled: 'Britain had gained experience of unsuccessful attempts to persuade small regional states into political unions which they had not themselves conceived. The fate of the West Indies Federation and the Federation of South Arabia was fresh in our minds.'¹¹³ Although Britain had encouraged moves towards closer association and warmly welcomed the creation of the United Arab Emirates, this structure stemmed largely from the Rulers themselves, most notably those of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The fact that the United Arab Emirates has survived, while other efforts to bring together former dependencies failed so conspicuously, owes much to the means of its inception. In addition to the unobtrusive, low-key role that Britain played in its creation, the UAE's establishment coincided with the ending of Britain's formal presence in the Lower Gulf. The new state, therefore, avoided the taint of association with British imperialism which had proved so damaging, and ultimately fatal, to the South Arabian Federation, especially in an era of virulently anti-colonial Arab nationalism.¹¹⁴ In a fitting epitaph on the failure of British policy in South Arabia, D. J. McCarthy lamented that 'The whole Federation was artificially created as an instrument of British policy.'¹¹⁵

Notes

¹ Letter from C. J. Treadwell to Alec Douglas-Home, 11 May 1972, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FCO 8/1923.

² 'HMG's long range policy in the Aden Protectorate and Aden Colony', Colonial Office memorandum, 22 Sept. 1955, TNA, CO 1015/1211.

³ Letter from Burrows to Lloyd, No. 12, 24 Jan. 1957, TNA, FO 371/126915/EA 1051/2.

⁴ 'United Kingdom Position in the Persian Gulf', Minute by J. B. Denson, 9 March 1957, TNA, FO 371/126915/EA 1051/11.

⁵ Letter from Luce to William Gorrell Barnes, 28 March 1958, TNA, CO 1015/1931.

⁶ 'Aden Protectorate', Memorandum by the Secretary for State for Colonies, 24 June 1958, C (58) 131, TNA, CAB 129/93.

⁷ Ibid..

⁸ Cabinet conclusions, 26 June 1958, CC (58) 50, TNA, CAB 128/32.

⁹ Record of a meeting between the Lord Privy Seal and the Supreme Council of the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South, 10 Jan. 1961, TNA, FO 371/156675.

¹⁰ Letter from Johnston to Iain Macleod, no. 399, 3 March 1961, TNA, FO 371/156675/B 1053/3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Letter from Watt to Johnston, no. 1300, 9 June 1961, TNA, CO 1015/2386.

¹³ Telegram from the Foreign Office to certain of Her Majesty's Representatives, No. 33, 19 Jan. 1962, FO 371/162971. See also 'Aden: Talks with Colony and Federal Ministers on merger', Colonial Office briefs, 16 July 1962, TNA, FO 371/162787.

¹⁴ Telegram from Johnston to the Secretary of State for Colonies, no. 621, 4 Oct. 1961, TNA CO 1015/2388.

¹⁵ Telegram from Johnston to the Secretary of State for Colonies, no. 622, 4 Oct. 1961, TNA, CO 1015/2388.

¹⁶ Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.80.

¹⁷ Letter from Johnston to Reginald Maudling, No. 726, 20 May 1962, TNA, FO 371/162785/B 1051/21.

¹⁸ Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p.231.

¹⁹ Telegram from Johnston to the Secretary of State for Colonies, No. 714, 30 Sept. 1962, TNA, FO 371/162790.

²⁰ United Arab Republic/Yemen Arab Republic.

²¹ Letter from the High Commissioner, Aden, to Duncan Sandys, Personal Despatch No. 5, 20 Feb. 1964, TNA, PREM 11/4678.

²² Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p.19.

²³ Telegram from Trevaskis to the Secretary of State for Colonies, No. 347, 21 April 1964, TNA, PREM 11/4680.

²⁴ 'Aden-Yemen', Minute by Douglas-Home to the Foreign Secretary, No. M 49/44, 5 May 1964, TNA, PREM 11/4680.

²⁵ Peter Hinchcliffe, 'The Political Officers in the Western Aden Protectorate', in Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker, and Maria Holt (eds.), *Without Glory: The British Retreat from Aden* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p.96.

²⁶ Report by Lord Beswick on a visit to South Arabia, 5-23 November 1965, 30 Nov. 1965, TNA, PREM 13/704.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 5 Aug. 1965, OPD (65) 36th meeting, TNA, CAB 148/18.

²⁹ 'Aden', Minute by Wright to the Prime Minister, 6 May 1964, TNA, PREM 11/ 4680.

³⁰ Minute by Arthur, 5 July 1965, TNA, FO 371/179751.

³¹ 'Defence review studies: Middle East policy', Memorandum by the Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee, 15 Oct. 1965, OPD (O)(65) 67, TNA, CAB 148/45.

³² Minutes of a meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, 24 Nov. 1965, OPD (65) 52nd meeting, TNA, CAB 148/18.

³³ 'Briefs for the Prime Minister's visit to Washington: The Defence Review', Note by the Foreign Office, 3 Dec. 1965, OPD (O) (65) 79, TNA, CAB 148/45.

³⁴ Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p.714.

³⁵ Letter from A. C. Ashworth to A. C. Ewell, 17 Feb. 1966, TNA, FO 371/185178/B 1052/68/G.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Statement on the Defence Estimates 1966: Part I: The Defence Review* (London: HMSO, 1966), Cmnd. 2901.

³⁹ John T. Ducker, 'Aden: The 1966 Defence White Paper', in Hinchcliffe, Ducker, and Holt, *Without Glory*, p.211. Ducker also argues that the 1966 Defence White Paper 'doomed any chance the Federation might have had of establishing itself after independence' (ibid., p.212).

⁴⁰ J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p.43.

⁴¹ Asher Orkaby, 'The Yemen Civil War: The Final British-Egyptian Imperial Battleground', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.51 (2015), p.204.

⁴² Cited in Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), p.193.

⁴³ For an account of the mutiny, see Aaron Edwards, *Mad Mitch's Tribal Law: Aden and the End of Empire* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2014), pp.166-181.

⁴⁴ Trevelyan is referring to the 1967 Six Day War.

⁴⁵ Telegram from Trevelyan to Brown, 28 June 1967, cited in Wm. Roger Louis and Stephen Ashton (eds.), *East of Suez and the Commonwealth: Part I* (London: TSO, 2003), p.253.

⁴⁶ Telegram from Trevelyan to Brown, 21 Aug. 1967, cited in Louis and Ashton (eds.), *East of Suez and the Commonwealth*, p.261.

⁴⁷ Telegram from Trevelyan to Sir Paul Gore-Booth, 10 Aug. 1967, cited in Louis and Ashton (eds.), *East of Suez and the Commonwealth*, p.258.

⁴⁸ 'South Arabia', Memorandum by Brown, 26 Oct. 1967, cited in Louis and Ashton (eds.), *East of Suez and the Commonwealth*, p.271.

⁴⁹ Cabinet conclusions, 30 Oct. 1967, CC 62 (67), TNA, CAB 128/42.

- ⁵⁰ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), p.310.
- ⁵¹ Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p.93.
- ⁵² Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Volume 2: Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, 1966-8* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p.541.
- ⁵³ See Helen von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.181-5.
- ⁵⁴ Minute by S. Falle, 17 Nov. 1965, TNA, FO 371/185177/B 1051/3.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ 'Future of British Protected States in the Persian Gulf', Minute by Brenchley, 18 Nov. 1965, TNA, FO 371/185177/B 1051/3.
- ⁵⁷ Letter from Luce to Roberts, No. 1041, 2 May 1966, TNA, FO 371/185167/B 1016/38.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ M.W. Daly, *The Last of the Great Proconsuls: The Biography of Sir William Luce* (San Diego: Nathan Berg, 2014), p.224.
- ⁶⁰ Letter from Luce to Michael Stewart, No. 18, 19 July 1966, TNA, FO 371/185167/B 1016/51.
- ⁶¹ 'Long-term policy in the Persian Gulf', Minute by P. R. Spendlove, 3 May 1967, TNA, FCO 8/623.
- ⁶² The following is based on 'Defence expenditure study No. 6: Long-term policy in the Persian Gulf', Report by the Defence Review Working Party, 7 June 1967, OPDO (67) 8, TNA, CAB 148/80.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Letter from Weir to Crawford, No. 1/5, 1 Feb. 1968, TNA, FCO 8/828.
- ⁶⁵ Letter from Parsons to Crawford, No. 2/4, 6 May 1968, TNA, FCO 8/12.
- ⁶⁶ Letter from Bullard to M. S. Weir, No. 2/10, 26 Nov. 1968, TNA, FCO 8/915.
- ⁶⁷ 'The Union of Arab Emirates', Minute by McCarthy, 18 March 1969, TNA, FCO 8/917.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ Letter from Crawford to Stewart, No. 1/14, 15 July 1969, TNA, FCO 8/920.
- ⁷⁰ Telegram from Stewart to the Bahrain Residency, No. 376, 22 Oct. 1969, TNA, FCO 8/923.
- ⁷¹ Telegram from Treadwell to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 318, 26 Oct. 1969, TNA, FCO 8/923.
- ⁷² Telegram from Treadwell to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 329, 1 Nov 1969, TNA, FCO 8/924.
- ⁷³ Letter from Stewart to Crawford, 10 Dec. 1969, TNA, FCO 8/925.
- ⁷⁴ 'Union of Arab Emirates', Minute by Acland, 18 May 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1293.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ Letter from Treadwell to Weir, No. 2/3, 27 Oct. 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1296.
- ⁷⁹ Telegram from Douglas-Home to Bahrain Residency, No. 503, 29 Oct. 1970, TNA, FCO/1296.
- ⁸⁰ Record of Political Agents' Conference, 12-13 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1297.

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- ⁸¹ Telegram from Arthur to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 558, 5 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1296.
- ⁸² Telegram from Stirling to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 28, 6 Dec. 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1297.
- ⁸³ 'Bahrain and the UAE', Minute by A. A. Acland, 10 Nov. 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1297.
- ⁸⁴ Telegram from American Embassy, London (Annenberg) to Secretary of State, No. 10982, 1 Dec. 1971, US National Archives, College Park, RG 59, Subject-Numeric Files 1970-73, Box 2640, POL 7 UAE.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.; 'Death of Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah', Minute by Acland, 25 Jan. 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1925.
- ⁸⁶ 'Persian Gulf: coup and countercoup in Sharjah', Intelligence Note: Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 4 Feb. 1972, US National Archives, College Park, RG 59, Subject-Numeric Files 1970-73, Box 2640, POL 7 UAE; Letter from Walker to Treadwell, 1 Feb. 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1925.
- ⁸⁷ Telegram from American Consul General (Dinsmore) to the Secretary of State, No. 368, 23 Feb. 1972, US National Archives, College Park, RG 59, Subject-Numeric Files 1970-73, Box 2560, POL 23-9 Qatar.
- ⁸⁸ Telegram from Henderson to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 61, 22 Feb. 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1891.
- ⁸⁹ Telegram from Treadwell to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, No. 155, 11 March 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1893.
- ⁹⁰ Letter from P. J. F. Manley to A. D. Harris, No. 3/8, 21 Aug. 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1894.
- ⁹¹ Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and Shaikh Khalifah bin Hamad, the Amir of Qatar, at lunch on 18 Sept. 1973, TNA, PREM 15/1757.
- ⁹² Letter from Walker to Treadwell, No. 1/1, 14 March 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1923.
- ⁹³ Letter from Treadwell to Douglas-Home, 11 May 1972, TNA, FCO 8/1923.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Ajman, Fujairah, Umm al Qaiwain.
- ⁹⁹ M.E. Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), p.374.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'Visit of Sheikh Hamad', Note by K. R. Tebbit, 3 Aug. 1973, TNA, FCO 8/1980.
- ¹⁰¹ At the inception of the UAE, oil-rich Abu Dhabi pledged to fund 85 per cent of the federal budget, but in subsequent years actually contributed up to 95 per cent (Andrea B. Rugh, *The Political Culture of Leadership in the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.82).
- ¹⁰² 'The rulership of Abu Dhabi', Minute by Patrick Gordon-Walker to the Prime Minister, PM/64/152, 22 Dec. 1964, TNA, PREM 13/3326.
- ¹⁰³ 'Lessons from South Arabia?', Minute by D. J. McCarthy, 20 Nov. 1967, TNA, FCO 8/41.
- ¹⁰⁴ 'Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf', Paper by the Planning Staff, 11 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 8/31.
- ¹⁰⁵ Record of a conversation between the Foreign Secretary and the Saudi Minister of Defence held at the Foreign Office, 1 May 1968, TNA, FCO 8/757.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Sir Stewart Crawford to Douglas-Home, 25 July 1970, TNA, FCO 8/1318.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, p.65.

¹¹⁰ Minute by Bourdillon, 20 Oct. 1961, TNA, CO 1015/2388.

¹¹¹ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, p.94.

¹¹² Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, p.20; 'PDRY leadership: Political philosophy and the power structure', FCO paper attached to I. T. M. Lucas' letter to J. H. Greenfield, 2 March 1977, TNA, FCO 8/2967.

¹¹³ Anthony Parsons, *They Say the Lion: Britain's Legacy to the Arabs: A Personal Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), p.121.

¹¹⁴ One Yemeni official memorably stated that the Federal Rulers came be seen as British selected chiefs 'of the day before yesterday' (R.J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975), p.341).

¹¹⁵ Letter from McCarthy to Brenchley, 17 Feb. 1966, TNA, FO 371/185178/B 1052/64.