

The Aden Pivot? British Counter-Insurgency after Aden

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Abstract: This article argues that the Aden Insurgency was a pivotal moment in the history of British counter-insurgency. We argue that it was in Aden where the newfound strength of human rights discourse, embodied in Amnesty International, and of anti-colonial sentiment, expressed by the UN General Assembly, forced the British government to pay attention to public perceptions of colonial brutality. Using archival sources, we foreground three episodes in the history of the insurgency to support our argument and to illustrate that the changes witnessed were not the result of ‘learning’ but of a fundamental shift in the international environment.

Counter-insurgency, which as a distinct theory of warfare was developed from the 19th century onwards – more intensely so between 1944 and 1980 in response to the wars of decolonisation and national liberation¹ – has recently become the subject of both academic and popular scrutiny. The theories of such warfare have been significantly revised since the publication of Callwell’s seminal *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practices*.² In current scholarly conceptualisation, the insurgents are no longer necessarily depicted as uncivilised, unreasonable and barbaric but sometimes as representing a complex challenge even in the context of technological and numerical disadvantage.³ Historical lessons from such conflicts are now studied hard, not least within the UK. Over the years of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan there has been a renewed interest in the lessons which may be derived from previous British campaigns. In this article, we highlight one specific aspect of recent deliberations which is that of the international context in which any campaign takes place. We argue that Aden provides a lesson of how international pressure and opinion can affect the politics of a conflict. We also argue that the Aden Campaign is important because of the growing attention paid to ‘colonial’ encounters.

The history of British counter-insurgency in the post-1945 period started with the failed campaign in Palestine, and continued through the various campaigns of decolonisation and nationalist struggle across the globe, including more than 30 years of bloody campaigns of Northern Ireland. The histories of these encounters have proved controversial with ‘official’ versions contested by the governments and peoples resistant to British rule. Perhaps one of the most important developments in recent years has been a reshaping of the insurgent experience. Not least we now have scholarly or journalistic works documenting the abuse suffered by Kenyans⁴ and Malaysians⁵ at the hands of British troops. These recent findings have made their way into public realm, with the British courts recently granting Kenyans ‘abused’ during the 1950s campaigns, financial compensation. And in the post 9/11 years there has been much concern over issues such as internment, torture and summary executions. Recent work has revisited the British ‘way’ of counter-insurgency with scholars seeking to establish whether it was ‘nasty’ or ‘nice’.⁶ Other scholars though, such as Karl Hack, have attempted to present a new type of orthodoxy which avoids any such easy characterisation.⁷ A final trend in recent scholarly engagement with British history of small wars is the exploration of the ‘myths’ of British counterinsurgency. These include arguments, widely accepted until the debacles of Afghanistan and Iraq, that the British have been ‘good’ at counter-insurgency because of their ability to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population and employed ‘minimum force’.⁸

Against this backdrop, this article re-examines the Aden Insurgency. It argues, as Andrew Mumford has elsewhere,⁹ that the campaign in Aden was ‘pivotal’ in the history of British counter-insurgency. However, where Mumford focuses on the overall changes in British strategy,¹⁰ this article rather looks at the importance of anti-colonial discourse and practice as a factor. It highlights a distinct strengthening of the discourse of human rights throughout the 1960s which eventually forced a change in counter-insurgency practice regarding the overt use of violence and force against civilians and prisoners. This argument does not in any way dismiss the previous protests against British counter-insurgency practices in places like Kenya.¹¹ However, it argues that an increase in official concern over the criticisms made by non-governmental organisations (NGOs)¹² and international organisations (IOs) coupled with the effect these claims had on policy formation, signified a shift in the British position. This argument that there was a ‘pivotal’ change in Aden is supported by archival evidence which reveals the international pressure, IOs and NGOs were able to exercise despite the recorded reluctance of officials to reject punitive ways of conducting counter-insurgency. In the 1960s, pragmatic concerns of cost were central to the decision to withdraw troops from many complex colonial environments,¹³ but so

too, we argue, were the pressures exerted by international and domestic criticism and recognition that the circumstances in which ‘excessive’ military action could be openly pursued were beginning to change.

So, in this article we foreground three different episodes during the Aden Insurgency to demonstrate that there was adaptation in response to international and domestic criticism within British political circles. First, we examine the ‘concessions’ made in response to the work of the UN’s Special Committee of the 24 on Decolonisation¹⁴ (hereafter Committee of 24). Second, we look at the involvement of Amnesty International with the cases of torture in Aden’s Fort Morbut Interrogation Centre. These first two episodes illustrate that some adjustments were made to appease the growing band of critics of British tactics. Then, we turn to the conduct of the rural counter-insurgency campaign in the Radfan (the rocky region north of Aden) to demonstrate that these concessions were made despite the fact that the British Army clearly retained the same mindset which drove its strategy and tactics in other bloody campaigns such as Cyprus.

THE ADEN INSURGENCY AND THE COMMITTEE OF 24

Between 1937¹⁵ and 18 January 1963, Aden was part of the British Empire. The areas surrounding Aden were tied to Britain by a series of Advisory and Protection Treaties that formed the Western and Eastern Aden Protectorates (WAP and EAP, respectively). On 4 April 1962, the 15 states of the WAP and Aden Colony agreed to be merged into the Federation of South Arabia (FSA). This came about as a result both of the machinations of the WAP sheikhs and the ambition of the British to create a unified state, one capable of administering its own territory by the end of colonisation. The merger was completed on 18 January 1963, reconstituting Aden as a state under British Protection.

The reasons behind the start of the insurgency in the Radfan in October 1963 were complex. A common factor that drove people to rebellion in rural and urban South Yemen was the Yemeni Revolution and civil war which took place over the border in the former Imamate of North Yemen, which had become the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). The revolution gave urban Adenis a government with which they could do business, while it provided rural tribesmen, like the Radfanis, who were recruited by the government of the YAR, with weapons and money. This in turn allowed them to rebel. In rural South Yemen, other reasons for insurgency was the meddling of the British authorities in local governance which disturbed traditional structures and bonds, as well as the imposition of unpopular figures like the Amir of Dhala in power. In Aden, a combination of nationalisms, including Arab Nationalism disseminated through transistor radios, poor working conditions, an influx of workers from the North and strong trade unionism in the form of the Aden Trade Union Council (ATUC), were also contributing factors. The rebellion which eventually developed into a revolt was given clear ideological justification by the formation of revolutionary movements, most important of which were the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) and the eventually victorious National Liberation Front (NLF). Both were nationalist and anti-colonial organisations, but the NLF’s tactics and rhetoric most clearly indicated that it was ideologically Marxist as well as committed to the principles and tactics of anti-colonial insurgency as articulated by Franz Fanon.¹⁶

The Aden Insurgency occurred within an international system which was in transition. The creation of the UN, the UN Charter and subsequent treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signified that people as well as states had rights under international law.¹⁷ This was important with regard to ‘empire’ and the rights of imperial powers to act with impunity against colonial peoples. By the 1960s, the problems already faced by the British Empire because of national financial weakness were compounded by the emergence of anti-colonialism. Anti-colonial ideology, as expressed by Fanon, had Marxist underpinnings and was concerned with identity.¹⁸ Such sentiments when combined with condemnation of the brutality of decolonisation struggles in territories like Algeria, Kenya and Cyprus created a widespread anti-colonial discourse. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (hereafter Resolution 1514) which was adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 14 December 1960 captures the moment when anti-colonialism sentiment entered the mainstream of international political and legal discourse. The resolution stated that the UN recognised ‘that the peoples of the world desire the end of colonialism in all its manifestations’.¹⁹ One of the key stipulations declared that

[a]ll armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence, and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected.²⁰

In 1961, the Committee of 24 was created by the UNGA to make recommendations to implement Resolution 1514.

The Committee of 24 became involved in the Aden Insurgency after the start of the Emergency on 10 December 1963 when the Public Emergency Decree²¹ that followed the attack on Trevaskis came in direct opposition to the UNGA's definition of a 'repressive measure' designed to hinder the people's quest for liberty as outlined in Resolution 1514. The Committee's delegation was, subsequently denied access to Aden by the British authorities. The delegation did, however, meet with a group from the Peoples' Socialist Party (PSP), which claimed to have suffered under the decree,²² in the YAR.

The report the Committee subsequently produced resulted in UNGA Resolution 1949. The Resolution found that the maintenance of the military base in Aden was prejudicial to the security of the region and that its early removal was therefore desirable. It recommended that the people of Aden and the protectorate should be allowed to exercise the right of self-determination and called upon Britain to lift the Emergency Regulations. The Resolution also urged Britain to instigate constitutional changes which would provide for the creation of representative institutions and of a provisional government, the creation of which would be followed by general elections on the basis of universal adult suffrage.²³ Resolution 1949 was followed by UNGA Resolution 1972, which urged the Government to immediately 'release (. . .) nationalist leaders and trade unionists' and to 'end all acts of deportation of residents of the Territory' which were taking place as a part of the Emergency Decree.²⁴ UNGA Resolutions 2023²⁵ and 2183²⁶ followed making similar recommendations.

The work of the Committee of 24 became a cause of some frustration both to the Colonial administration in Aden and the government in London. In Aden, the Resolutions empowered local politicians to demand that constitutional reform followed the agenda proposed by the UNGA and allowed for a variety of opposition to the colonial administration.²⁷ In London and at Steamer Point (the district where the Office of the High Commission was housed), throughout 1964 and 1965, there was distinct irritation with the unfavourable disposition of the Committee of 24 and the UNGA in general towards British actions. There was also an increasing awareness of the 'damage' to the reputation of the Government. At a meeting of the House of Lords in June 1965 regarding the work of the Committee of 24, Lord Walton expressed both frustration and a new-found awareness of the issue by asking the Earl of Dundee

whether he is aware that we are spending hundreds of millions of pounds, to the great disadvantage of our balance of payments, at Aden and elsewhere, in defending the freedom and independence of most of this Committee of 24 who spend all their time in demanding that we should withdraw from Aden? Is the noble Lord aware that our action in continuing to serve on this Committee is interpreted very widely in the United Nations, not as an act of good nature and good will on our part but as a confession of colonialist guilt (. . .).²⁸

Opposition to British policies and presence in the region continued in the UN Security Council (UNSC), which examined a complaint made by the YAR against Britain. The complaint was in respect of the violation of the YAR's airspace and a subsequent attack at Harib fortress on 28 March 1964. The attack on Harib, which resulted in the deaths of 25 YAR civilians, numerous injuries and material damage,²⁹ had been designed to stem the provision of arms, ammunition and people into the FSA organised by the YAR and its Egyptian overlords. Indeed the insurgency itself was believed to be orchestrated by the YAR and Egypt. (It should be noted here though, that the decision to attack Harib had not been taken lightly by British officials and, as Clive Jones has pointed out, arose from a rather complex series of pressures such as fear of Egyptian intervention³⁰ as well as the complaints of the Federation rulers that Britain had failed to protect them from external air attacks.) The Resolution stated that the UN 'Deplores the British military action at Harib' and requested that the YAR and British governments exercise 'restraint in order to avoid further incidents and restore peace in the area'.³¹

Also, subject to sustained criticism were other aspects of British counterinsurgency, not least proscription campaigns. These were the campaigns in which fliers were dropped by RAF planes into villages warning the rebellious tribesmen to leave the area because the bombing which was to follow would target anything that moved. (The issue of these fliers was in itself a subject of controversy as levels of literacy were low and the ability needed to actually read and then act upon the warnings amongst these rural peoples must be in doubt. Also, as the attack on Harib had proved, the leaflets dropped in advance of the bombing had actually failed to disperse. Such deficiencies were recognised after the Harib attack). These campaigns were used as mechanisms for collective punishment by destroying livestock, land, housing stock and, of course, people. Bombing was also used preemptively so that after warnings, the men women and children

would vacate villages, their buildings would then be flattened so that the local population would have to expend their energies in rebuilding their communities rather than in acts of insurgency.

As Samuel Moyn has argued elsewhere, anti-colonialism was not necessarily a human rights movement. But in this case the impact of human suffering coupled with the work of the UNGA and UNSC driven by anti-colonial concerns brought attention to British conduct. Kennedy Trevaskis in a communication with the State Secretary for the Colonies, Duncan Sandys, on 5 April 1964 commented on the deterioration of the situation in the Radfan and argued that

[w]hile the only real answer to subversion is to give in return what we received with interest it takes time to get results and so far we are, in any event, not fully prepared or authorised to take effective action.³²

He argued that only a proscription campaign could bring about the desired results. Sandys, in reply, urged him to delay any action until the UNSC session in Washington had finished.³³ In a telegram on 7 April 1965 Sandys explained that:

we cannot get away with presenting any action which we have to take merely as an internal security operation. The fact is that attacks with bombs or cannon fire strike opinion here at any rate as being methods of the last century and we get no public support from the uncommitted countries, and not from our European friends or the Americans.³⁴

This exchange illustrated that pressure through the UNSC and UNGA was becoming a factor in the conduct (or at least the public presentation) of the counter-insurgency campaign. It also shows that,³⁵ some British officials remained dedicated to the conduct of traditional methods. The preferred course of action for Trevaskis was ‘to give in return what we received with interest’ a common enough sentiment in post war British counter-insurgency: this sentiment was previously expressed by British officials for example in relation to the use of the ‘Mwea technique’ during the Mau Mau rebellion³⁶ and during the first phase of the Malayan campaign.³⁷ Thus, our first episode indicates that external pressure did cause a degree of official British concern over British actions. It should be noted here that the British Government was also concerned by the potential repercussions of ill feeling from the USA and the continued criticism of British ‘imperialism’ in the region. This actually led to a large degree of dissembling over British sanctioned mercenary activity,³⁸ and an increased covert use of the military, especially Special Forces, in acts of sabotage. This was something though that the Americans were, through their intelligence sources, well aware of and merely increased Washington’s distrust of British pronouncements. We might note that an increased use of covert activities quite often follows public condemnation of counter-insurgency, so while states may very well adapt or appear to adapt to criticism on a public level, parts of the bureaucracy, such as the military, may and indeed do continue to act in a familiar manner.³⁹ However, it clearly seems to us that pressure from international agencies did at the very least cause British policy to publicly shift after Harib, and indeed when we turn to the use of torture we see even more clearly the way in which the British authorities were ‘brought to book’ over their behaviour.

TORTURE AT FORT MORBUT

As mentioned above, the impact of anti-colonialism and the rise of human rights temporarily coincided in the case of Aden. However, these movements, that individually and together illustrate unequivocally a seismic change in the international system, were not identical. Where anti-colonialism was concerned with the state, human rights expressed an even newer principle, that all people irrespective of their identity, national or otherwise, have rights in international law.⁴⁰ Furthermore, contrary to the widely accepted orthodoxy that the human rights agenda developed in the wake of the Holocaust, Moyn argues that the project came into its own in the late 1970s when the existing, competing utopian ideas came crashing down.⁴¹ Moyn’s argument strengthens the contention that Aden represents a pivotal moment in the history of counter-insurgency, since it coincided with and was affected by the moment when the human rights project was gaining credence and strength prior to its establishment as our age’s Last Utopia.⁴²

Allegations of torture and degrading treatment are familiar parts of the story of British counter-insurgency.⁴³ In the context of this article, it is important to note that during the Cyprus Emergency, which had directly preceded the Aden Insurgency, several men died in custody while six died as a direct result of torture during interrogation.⁴⁴ Simon Robbins notes that prisoners in Cyprus ‘were subjected to conveyor belt interrogation methods with relays of torturer so that questioning accompanied by physical assault could be sustained.’⁴⁵ Furthermore, it is significant to note that according to Robbins during the Cyprus Emergency, journalists jokingly called these interrogators ‘HMTs’, meaning ‘Her Majesty’s Torturers’.⁴⁶ This section examines the events that led to the launch of an official inquiry, undertaken

by Sir Roderic Bowen, into the conditions that drove the High Commissioner at the time, Richard Turnbull, to ignore allegations of maltreatment of detainees at Aden's Fort Morbut Interrogation Centre for more than two months. As the examination of the archive evidence below demonstrates, torture and degrading treatment were part and parcel of the Aden Insurgency. This particular episode shows that the official attitude towards it changed in the years after the end of the Cyprus Emergency.

Second, it illustrates how a newly founded NGO which was solely concerned with human rights, was able to force the British government to concede, however reluctantly, to the launch of the investigation. This indicates that there was significant step change in both the nature of the human rights programme and its influence exercised, strikingly by non-state groups. In this context, we foreground the foundation of Amnesty International by the British lawyer Peter Benenson in 1961. The organisation's purpose was to protect prisoners of conscience and to ensure recognition of Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that refer to person's right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and freedom of opinion and expression, respectively.⁴⁷ The campaigns focused on political prisoners imprisoned as a result of the Emergency Decree, effectively turning a spotlight on British actions in Aden.

According to Amnesty International, allegations of degrading treatment had been reported in Aden after the instigation of the Emergency Decree on 10 December 1963.⁴⁸ On 5 June 1965, new Emergency Regulations were introduced in Aden State. The NLF was banned as a terrorist organisation and Turnbull was given permission to use detention without trial. The Times noted that this High Commissioner could now, and not before time, start to use his experience in fighting Mau Mau, but as Clive Jones has noted, nationalists in the region regarded such measures as 'fascist'.⁴⁹ The official investigation into the maltreatment of detainees at Fort Morbut Interrogation Centre, which in itself is a remarkable step considering the acceptance of torture only a few years earlier in Cyprus, was concerned with the period between 18 October and 24 December 1965.

The evidence we have thus far unearthed from the archive highlights the failure of the British authorities to initially take seriously the allegations of torture at Fort Morbut. The first memorandum regarding the maltreatment of detainees, written by his legal advisers, reached Richard Turnbull on 19 October 1965; on 27 November 1965 the Chief of Intelligence rejected the allegations. On 18 December 1965, medical reports by the Director of Health Services backed the allegations, and on 24 December 1965, Turnbull finally ordered a judicial enquiry.⁵⁰ Archival evidence demonstrates that the British government had no plans to launch an inquiry into the reasons behind this delay from the first memorandum to the launch of the internal enquiry. However, George Brown's hand was forced by a report written by Swedish Dr Salahadi Rastgeldi on behalf of Amnesty International.⁵¹

After December 1965, Mr Rochat, a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), another organisation committed to the protection of human rights, was allowed to visit Aden's Interrogation and Detention Centres to review the conditions in which the prisoners were being kept and how they were treated. However, these visits took place with the understanding that the reports would remain confidential, between the British government and the ICRC. Benenson of Amnesty International wrote: 'the British Government would not permit any inspection of Aden by delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross during 1964 and that, although a delegate visited twice in 1965, he was not able to visit the detainees.' Permission was eventually granted by Anthony Greenwood, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in December 1965 'two years after the complaints had started.'⁵² Greenwood's agreement can be seen as a wholly pragmatic move to placate international opinion in the wake of serious complaints that had reached both NGOs and the British authorities. This pragmatism is partly evidenced by the timeline, since Mr Rochat was only granted permission following the acknowledgement of the allegations by the High Commissioner. Some cynicism is evident in a letter to the Arabian Department sent from Government House in Aden. After expressing exasperation with Mr Rochat's 'gullible' nature because 'he allowed himself to be convinced that systematic torture had "recommence"(sic) at Fort Morbut', the author of the letter argues that there may be some advantages to Rochat's visits, stating that 'we can say that the Red Cross comes and that our opponents cannot say that it does not.'⁵³ Permitting the ICRC's involvement may be seen either as a pragmatic move designed to pre-empt any condemnation that would follow in the event that complaints of ill treatment were made public or a bowing to sustained pressure.

The British government tried to avoid making the complaints public but attempts made to this end were frustrated by the report of Dr Rastgeldi. He detailed that 'In 1964, case reports about detained political persons in Aden began coming to Amnesty International, London. In many of these case reports the local British authorities were accused of using physical torture, at least during interrogation, as a means of extorting a confession.'⁵⁴ (This was a usual method of collecting intelligence, since as the Cyprus case had taught Special Branch, under torture prisoners 'began to "sing" like

“canaries”.’⁵⁵) Prompted by these complaints, Rastgeldi was sent to Aden. Before his arrival, Amnesty International tried to secure the consent of the British Authorities to actually permit Rastgeldi to visit detainees. This request was rejected on the grounds that the detainees in Aden were not actually political prisoners but terrorists; therefore, the condition of their arrest and detention was of no concern to Amnesty International.⁵⁶

Upon his arrival on 28 July 1966, Rastgeldi tried to arrange a meeting with the High Commissioner, who he met at midday on 30 July. During the meeting, Turnbull repeated the argument that there were no political detainees in Aden and thus refused to let Rastgeldi visit Fort Morbut Interrogation Centre and Al Massoura Detention Centre. So, during his visit Rastgeldi spoke only with ex-detainees, families of detainees and members of the Aden Legislative Council. The subsequent report highlighted the most common allegations of torture made by those who had been detained:

1. Undressing the detainees and making them stand naked during interrogation.
2. Keeping detainees naked in super-cooled cells with air conditioners and fans running at high speed.
3. Keeping the detainees awake by irritating them while they are exhausted.
4. Offering food to hungry detainees and removing it just as they start eating.
5. Forcing detainees to sit on poles directed towards their anus.
6. Hitting and twisting their genital organs.
7. Extinguishing cigarettes on their skin.
8. Forcing them to run in circles until they are exhausted.
9. Banning visits to lavatories so that they soil their cells with faeces and urine.
10. Keeping them in filthy toilets with the floor covered with urine and faeces.⁵⁷

The report was accompanied by affidavits sworn in front of a Mr Crouch, a representative of the High Commissioner, and Ashraf Khan, the Commissioner of Oaths.⁵⁸

The report’s main points were summarised in a letter to the Prime Minister Harold Wilson and written by Hans Goran Franck of the Swedish Section of the organisation.⁵⁹ According to Eric Baker of the British Section of the NGO, subsequent attempts by members of the British Section ‘to raise certain factual question were met with dilatoriness; on one occasion it took seven weeks to get an answer to a simple question despite repeated letters and telephone calls.’⁶⁰ On 29 September, Foreign Minister George Brown offered ‘to send at some unknown future date some unnamed Foreign Office representative who would be concerned only with procedure and not with investigating any of the allegations of torture’.⁶¹ The organisation considered this ‘a poor “concession”’.⁶² Therefore, in a press release on 17 October 1966 it argued that, ‘If Amnesty has now to make public allegations of ill-treatment and torture this is essentially because the British Government has refused to allow proper investigation or to accept suggestions for an improvement in existing procedure.’⁶³

The assignment of an investigation into the procedures of arrest and detention to Sir Roderic Bowen followed a week after this press release, indicating the power of the newly established NGO derived from a more assertive and widespread discourse of human rights. Shortly after, the British government complained that Dr Rastgeldi’s report, which was finally published on 1 December 1966, was prejudicial to Britain. Amnesty replied that ‘by allowing the delegate to go to Aden but by refusing him all facilities and declining to put forward any contrary evidence, the inevitable result was that our delegate would have nothing to publish except statements made by Adeni complainants’.⁶⁴

Here it should be noted that Rastgeldi’s claims were at least in part corroborated by a letter sent to the editor of the Sunday Times by a corporal, G.S. Lennox, who had served in Aden from February 1964 to February 1966. In a subsequent interview with the correspondent of the Sunday Times in Bonn, on 29 October 1966, Lennox stated that his reason for writing was ‘to put right what he thought was an inaccuracy in last Sunday’s report and to show that the “allegations of maltreatment of Adeni detainees by British servicemen and reports by Amnesty International are not without foundation”’.⁶⁵ During this interview, Lennox recounted how ‘[o]n a number of occasions the guards on duty inside the centre had described to him how they had “thumped” the detainees.’⁶⁶ He further stated that ‘The versions of the guards differ very slightly, if at all, from the charges reported by Amnesty’. He also recalled a specific episode which took place while he was on guard duty. He claimed that:

Through our guardroom window I watched three soldiers, from a famous Yorkshire infantry regiment drag out an Adeni detainee into the exercise yard. There was blood coming from the man’s mouth and he was dressed only in a loincloth around his waist. The three soldiers, standing about 5 yards apart,

began in turn to hit the Adeni. The first soldier was using a 5-ft long broom handle and was beating the man about the head and prodding him in his midriff and genitals. He was then passed to the second soldier who hit him with a tin mug. The third used his fists. The Adeni twice fell unconscious and was revived with a fire hose only to be beaten again.⁶⁷

Jonathan Walker, in his book *Aden Insurgency*, speculates that this incident related to the aftermath and reaction to the murder of Sergeant Hatton of the RAF by a 'local terrorist'. He attributes the actions Lennox described to 'frustration at the lack of official retribution' that may have affected the judgement of some guards.⁶⁸ Based on medical reports of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Walker refutes the claims of systematic abuse made by Rastgeldi and Lennox.⁶⁹ Lennox himself argued that the conditions in Aden made him and others involved in the counter-insurgency campaign apathetic to ill treatment of others. He stated: "These events didn't have any significance for me at the time. It was all so commonplace and normal."⁷⁰ This apathy or indifference is in itself a common enough sentiment amongst those who torture or witness torture and ill treatment of others over a prolonged period.⁷¹ At a distance it is almost impossible to absolutely verify or refute claims of systematic abuse at Fort Morbut. However, from what we now know about British actions elsewhere, the de-humanising effect of war and the willingness of some officials to participate in torture programmes,⁷² as well as the evidence gathered by representatives of NGOs, it seems clear enough that some form of abuse of the rights of detainees did take place in Aden.

Bowen was ostensibly sent to Aden to inquire over these procedures. In light of the events and the discussion above, it is obvious that this was a compromise which would allow the British Government to appear as if it was doing something regarding allegations of torture, while not publicly addressing the allegations themselves. This compromise which was forced onto the British government by Amnesty took place at a pivotal moment for the history of the universal human rights project and for that of British counter-insurgency which had never before been forced to adapt its policy according to the actions or wishes of a NGO specifically dedicated to human rights.

The effects of Bowen's report were far reaching since it indicated that the British government would from that time forth be unable to conduct its counter-insurgency campaign with impunity, choosing what information it would release or which investigations to conduct. This is especially evident in the fears expressed that the subsequent investigations that followed the report would force the authorities to court martial the three main culprits, thus having 'a lot of dirty linen washed in public'.⁷³ This was prevented for lack of evidence. However, the report proved especially damning for the High Commissioner who was ultimately responsible for both the Interrogation and Detention Centres and was eventually removed from his position. Bowen stated: 'there was a most regrettable failure to deal expeditiously and adequately with the allegations of cruelty which were made in respect of the Interrogation Centre (. . .)'.⁷⁴ As a result of the investigations, Bowen made a series of recommendations, the majority of which were put into effect. However, the most crucial recommendations namely: closing the Interrogation Centre and making sure that the interrogators were not solely members of the armed forces, were not put into effect.⁷⁵

These events illustrate first a significant change in attitudes to torture. Unlike Cyprus, where journalists joked about the brutal actions of Special Brand Interrogators, indicating an acceptance of their actions as legitimate;⁷⁶ the British government's attempts to stop the publication of Rastgeldi's report indicate that there was a diminished tolerance for such methods. Second, the initial reluctance with which the British government addressed concerns over human rights abuses in Aden indicate that its subsequent actions were in reality a reaction to Amnesty International's threats to make Restgeldi's report public. This is further evidence of the increasing strength of human rights discourse and the change in the international system which allowed NGOs to exercise significant power. The combination of the two in Aden made for a pivotal change in British counter-insurgency in regards to the use of violence.

THE RADFAN REVOLT

We do not claim that the overall outcome of the counter-insurgency campaign in Aden was solely a result of a reluctant change in strategy and policy brought about by human rights and anti-colonialism forwarded by NGOs and IOs. It was also affected by a combination of factors like the British loss of power East of Suez, the Sterling Crisis and the retention of colonial mindsets, evident in the reluctance with which the British government made concessions to the newly developed norms described above. Here we examine the latter in relation to the rural campaign in the Radfan to illustrate further that change was not driven by the British government's change of attitude but by outside forces which

at this pivotal moment attained a central position in governments' calculations regarding the conduct of counterinsurgency.

Unsurprisingly, persistence of ideas over the 'character' of the Arabs, especially those who were members of the rural tribes remained in this period simplistic and in our terms racist.⁷⁷ For example, High Commissioner Kennedy Trevaskis, who had been in South Arabia since 1951 wrote of the populations of the WAP that they were a 'backward people' amongst who existed a 'domesticated few'.⁷⁸ The persistence of this type of what has been designated a 'colonial' mindset is evident throughout the archive correspondence between officials. This type of attitude though was especially marked in the suppression of the revolt in the Radfan, which had marked the beginning of the insurgency. (We have not attempted to provide a complete history of the revolt; other works have done that admirably; instead, we use some of the archival evidence to reveal the thinking that dictated the counter insurgency strategy and the treatment of the native peoples.⁷⁹)

The origins of the Radfan revolt, as we saw in the beginning, can be found deep in the Yemeni Civil War. Tribesmen from the region had joined the newly formulated National Guard in the YAR, which was engaged in a civil war. Vitaly Naumkin in his book *Red Wolves of Yemen* argues that these men rebelled after they were requested by British forces and the Amir of Dhala to lay down the weapons they kept with them upon their return to the Radfan from the YAR. Here it should be noted that the sour relationship between the Radfanis and the Amir predated the insurgency. For example, as early as March 1963, the Qutaibi Shaykh was requesting freedom from the authority of the Amir.⁸⁰ Naumkin argues that the exploitation the Radfanis suffered both by the Amir and foreign forces eventually led to the rebellion.⁸¹

The rebellion that started in the Radfan was, however, different to previous incidents. The main reason was that while the Radfanis were in the YAR they were recruited by the Egyptians and the Yemenis to form a Front for the Liberation of South Yemen. Though the initial attempts to form a Liberation Front failed, this experience aided the leaders of the NLF which had its headquarters in Sana'a and later in Taiz, to infiltrate and then guide the rebellion. As a result of the involvement of the NLF the security situation worsened in the months that followed the start of the rebellion. By December 1963, telegrams reached London arguing that 'it is essential to make an early show of force in this area if this type of trouble is [sic.] not to spread to other parts of the Federation.'⁸² Operation Nutcracker was launched in January 1964, which employed proscription campaigns to quell the revolt. These policies aimed at silencing the grievances of the Radfanis through punitive action.

By March 1964, the NLF had reportedly 'succeeded in maintaining serious unrest in Western areas and in a continuing revolt in Radfan'⁸³ since the rebellion showed 'every sign of spreading into other areas.'⁸⁴ In April, Trevaskis sent a telegram to Sandys which asserted with certainty that the United Arab Republic (Egypt and the YAR) was behind the revolt since the rebels were well armed and led by uniformed Yemeni officers. Mention of Egyptian subversion is common in most security reports sent to London throughout the Insurgency. However, while Egypt was indeed actively supporting the rebellion which progressed into a fully fledged insurgency, the assertion that it was the only actor ignores the other factions at work. By November 1967, a report on the NLF, which had emerged victorious from the insurgency, stated that by 'the end of August, 1964, the N.L.F. had struck out on its own' and that any control Cairo and the YAR had over it was particularly loose.⁸⁵ This is a significant observation because, in retrospect, it reveals the myopia of the British government to what was happening in the Radfan in respect of the local agenda. Specifically with regard to the NLF it led officials to ignore the deep roots it had in both anti-colonial sentiment but also Marxist discourse. In turn, this view informed strategy.

Due to the all round condemnation of the proscription campaign against Harib fortress on 28 March 1964, it was not considered possible to use proscription against the tribes. By 28 May 1964, a telegram urgently requested another phase of operations to neutralise the tribes of Radfan and so that other tribes realised that 'dissidence does not pay'.⁸⁶ Thus, in May 1964 a new proscription campaign was authorised against the Radfan. This new offensive eventually limited rebel activity to snipping.⁸⁷ By 20 June 1964, most of the Radfan was brought under control apart from sporadic attacks.⁸⁸ A day later, commenting on the 'success' of operations, Trevaskis stated that human casualties and much damage was inflicted, meaning that 'The tribes of Radfan have already been taught a sharp lesson.'⁸⁹ The effects of this 'sharp lesson' on the population were elaborated upon by the Sunday Telegraph's Richard Beeston. In an article he wrote of the actions of the British forces: 'Patrols are systematically burning foodstocks and farm stockades, and destroying livestock left behind. They are also preventing the inhabitants returning to their villages to sow their crops now that the rainy season has arrived.'⁹⁰

As a result, by July, British and Federal forces were in a position to dominate the Radfan.⁹¹ Following victory a peace process was established. A British Political Officer was instructed to obtain ‘the most effective surrender possible in terms of rifles, hostages and admission of culpability (. . .) with promises of good behaviour’. When the Political Officer felt that he had ‘extracted the heaviest terms possible’ the tribe would be allowed to return to its land.⁹²

The policy pursued by the British government was effective, at least militarily. However, the events that followed demonstrate the inability of the British government to appreciate the genuine grievances of the Radfanis, the ideological commitments of the NLF, and to see the longer term ineffectiveness of punitive action. Hence, the situation soon deteriorated again. By August 1964, a third front had been opened in Dhala leading a political officer to argue that this showed evidence of Egyptian training and direction since ‘[r]ebels have shown a degree of co-ordination and determination unusual in Arab fighting in South Arabia.’⁹³ Furthermore, trouble now spread to previously unaffected areas in the WAP.⁹⁴

Spencer Mawby,⁹⁵ John Newsinger⁹⁶ and Thomas Mockaitis⁹⁷ have variously argued that ‘colonial mindsets’, amongst other causes including the sterling crisis and the aversion of some backbenchers within the Labour Party to imperial escapades, led to Britain’s eventual exit from South Arabia which signified the failure of the counter-insurgency campaign to attain its goals. The archival evidence discussed above confirms this assertion. However, the previous sections of this article also add that to these arguments by illustrating that the British position and actions became increasingly untenable precisely because of the critique of NGOs and agencies of the United Nations, which was based on anti-colonial principles and human rights.

CONCLUSION

As Andrew Mumford has argued, Aden was pivotal in the history of British counterinsurgency; we agree but for rather different reasons. We demonstrated the effect of a growing anti-colonial sentiment and a concern for human rights in public and international opinion that compelled the British government to adapt in Aden. This contradicts the strand of argument in counter-insurgency, which highlights a ‘learning’ process building on the work of men such as T.E. Lawrence.⁹⁸ This article strengthens arguments forwarded by Mumford, David French and others,⁹⁹ who in response to the British experience in Iraq and Afghanistan have closely interrogated the ‘myths’ which have informed our understandings of British counter-insurgency. They have argued that a close re-examination of the British experience shows that ‘success’ was a result of coercion instead of ‘minimum force’ and a talent for winning ‘hearts and minds’. Similarly, this article has demonstrated that a British penchant for coercion did not naturally wane; however, by 1962 the tide had turned in international norms, making some strategies unacceptable in the public’s eye. Aden, the first theatre of war where Britain had to face international public opinion became the turning point which forced policy-makers’ to see that there were limits to coercion.

Of course, abuse continued to take place throughout British campaigns, one need only think of the long campaign in Ireland from 1969 onwards, but it was in Aden that ideas of accountability and responsibility came into the calculations of British officials. Such calculation would continue to cause concern in the future for the public presentation of similar campaigns, indicating a marked desire to justify brutality. All of this indicates that Aden was a pivot in the history and development of the conduct of British counter-insurgency.

NOTES

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3. Tarak Barkawi, ‘On the Pedagogy of Small Wars’, *International Affairs* 80/1 (2004) pp.19–37.
4. For an excellent account of the burgeoning historiography on the Mau Mau and British strategy see Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya Counterinsurgency, Civil War and Decolonisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009). For a searing critique of British colonialism in Kenya see, Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (Henry Holt & Company 2005).
5. Karl Hack, ‘Everyone Lived in Fear: Malaya and the British Way of Counterinsurgency’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23/4–5 (2012) pp.671–99.
6. See: Matthew Hughes, ‘Introduction: British Ways of Counter-Insurgency’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23/4–5 (2012) pp.580–90.
7. Hack (note 5).
8. Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth the British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (Abingdon: Routledge 2012); David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-67* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).
9. Mumford (note 8).

10. Ibid., p.72.
11. See discussion of legal cases over torture brought against the British in Kenya in David M. Anderson, 'British Abuse and Torture in Kenya's Counter-Insurgency, 1952-1960', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23/4-5 (2012) pp.700-19.
12. On this theme see Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2001).
13. See: P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750-1914', *The Economic History Review* 33/4 (1980) pp.463-90.
14. When the Committee was founded there were 17 members. The number 24 signifies the number of states who became members of the Committee in 1962. The numbers have varied ever since.
15. Between 1839 and 1937 Aden was administered from Bombay making it a part of British India. Aden was detached from British India and was established as a British Colony as a result of the Government of India Act 1935.
16. See: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press 2004).
17. See: Chri Brown, *Sovereignty, Rights and Justice, International Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2002).
18. Ibid.
19. United Nations' General Assembly, 'Resolution 1514: Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', online at [http://www.undemocracy.com/A-RES-1514\(XV\).pdf](http://www.undemocracy.com/A-RES-1514(XV).pdf)., accessed 5 Oct. 2012.
20. Ibid.
21. CO 1055/195, The Public Emergency Decree, 1963, The Constitution of the Federation of South Arabia, Legal Supplement 2, to the Federation of South Arabia Gazette no. 6, 11 Dec. 1963: The decree provided for the arrest without a warrant of 'any person in respect of whom he [the member of the police or army] has reason to believe that there are grounds which would justify the making of detention order (. . .) any person whom he has reasonable grounds for suspecting to have acted or be acting or be about to acting a manner prejudicial to public safety'. Furthermore, the 'member of a Discipline Force [police or army] may take such steps and use such force as may appear to him to be reasonably necessary . . .'. It further gave the 'discipline forces' the right to stop and search any person, put anyone under 'restricted arrest' or detention and enter and search premises without a warrant. Finally it prohibited the use of placards and banned meeting of five or more people and processions of 15 or more unless they had permission. A further decree in 1964 (CO 1055/195, The Public Emergency Decree, 1964, The Constitution of the Federation of South Arabia, Legal Supplement 2, to the Federation of South Arabia Gazette no.3, 15 Aug. 1964) also provided for the banning of newspapers, films and for the seizure of publications.
22. CO 1055/62, Telegram from High Commissioner Charles Johnston to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 'Resume of Aden intelligence summary no.5 for the month May 1963', sent 8 Jun. 1963.
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24. UNGA Resolution 1972, 'The situation in Aden', 16 Dec. 1963, online at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/186/47/IMG/NR018647.pdf?OpenElement>., accessed 5 Oct. 2012.
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26. UNGA Resolution 2183, 'Question of Aden', 12 Dec. 1966, online at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00fd710.html#_ftn2., accessed 7 Oct. 2012.
27. CO 1055/62, Savigram, 'LIC Aden Monthly Intelligence Summary for April 1964', Sent 5 May 1964.
28. House of Lords, UN Special Committee and the Aden base, 15 Jun. 1965, vol. 267, cc 4-7, online at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1965/jun/15/un-special-committee-and-theaden-base>., accessed 5 Oct. 2012.
29. UNSC, 'Complaint by Yemen, Initial Proceedings', p.127, online at http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/64-65/Chapter%208/64-65_08-5-Complaint%20by%20Yemen.pdf., accessed 4 Nov. 2012.
30. For a detailed account of British policy, see Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965. Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Sussex, Sussex University Press 2004).
31. UNSC, Resolution 188, 'Complaint by Yemen' 9 April 1964, online at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/211/46/IMG/NR021146.pdf?OpenElement>., accessed 22 Oct. 2012.
32. CO 1055/200, Telegram from High Commissioner Kennedy Trevaskis to Secretary of State for the Colonies Duncan Sandys, 'Egyptian/Yemeni threat to Federation', 5 Apr. 1964.
33. CO 1055/200, Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies Duncan Sandys to High Commissioner Kennedy Trevaskis, 'Radfan', 5 Apr. 1964.
34. CO 1055/200, Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies Duncan Sandys to High Commissioner Kennedy Trevaskis, 'Internal Security in the Federation', 7 Apr. 1964.
35. UNGA Resolution 1514.
36. See: Anderson (note 11) p.711.
37. Hack (note 5).
38. See Mumford (note 8) p.91. For an account of British policy and the difficulties of gathering intelligence, see Jones (note 30) p.97.
39. For a clearly stated account of how some British officials turned a 'blind eye' to covert activities see

- Mumford (note 8) pp.75–6.
40. See: UNGA, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 Dec. 1948, online at ,<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>., accessed 19 Nov. 2012.
41. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2010) p.1.
42. Ibid.
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56. WO 32/20987, 'Letter from Mr Walter Padley, MP, Minister of State Foreign Office to Amnesty International, 28 Jul. 1966.
57. WO 32/20987, 55B, Salahadin Rastgeldi, Amnesty International: Aden Report 4, 1 Dec. 1966, pp.8–9.
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60. WO 32/20987, Eric Baker Chairman of British Section of Amnesty International: 'Aden', Oct. 1966.
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63. WO 32/20987, Amnesty International Press Release: 'Aden', 17 Oct. 1966, p.2.
64. WO 32/20987, Peter Benenson President of the International Executive of Amnesty International, 'Report: Aden 1963–1966', 11 Nov. 1966.
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66. Ibid., p.3.
67. Ibid., pp.1–2.
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69. Ibid., p.188.
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71. See, for example, the account of reactions to torture as explored by Susan Sontag in 'Regarding the Torture of Others', *The New York Times*, 23 May 2004. See also, Nancy Sherman, *The Untold War. Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (New York: Norton 2010).
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74. WO 32/20987, Report by Mr. Roderic Bowen, Q.C., on Procedures for Arrest, Interrogation and Detention of Suspected Terrorists in Aden, 14 Nov. 1966 (London: Her Majesty's Office, 1966), p.17.
75. Ibid., pp. 19–24.
76. Robbins, (note 44), p.731.
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96. Newsinger (note 29) pp.109–30.
97. Mockaitis (note 79) pp.66–8.
98. See Vino Roy, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters: The Legacy of T.E. Lawrence and Sayyid Qutb', *Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society* XXI/1 (2012) pp.9–54.
99. See Mumford (note 8); French (note 8); John Newsinger, 'The British Counter-Insurgency Myth', *Race & Class* 55/1 (2013) pp.92–7.