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2014

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Recommended Citation

Smitson, Scott, "Teaching Notes for CHAPTER 2: The Road to Good Intentions: British Nation-building in Aden" (2014). *Teaching Notes*. Paper 1.

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TEACHING NOTES

The Road to Good Intentions: British Nation-building in Aden

By Scott Smitson*

Despite well over a century of colonial influence in South Arabia, the British government failed to create a lasting and effective constitutional construct. Challenges included addressing the myriad of issues inherent when trying to introduce democratic institutions in an area that had little to no experience with democratic norms and ideas concurrent with western perceptions of modern states. Culminating in the Aden Emergency of 1964–1967, the British efforts to disengage from its former colonial territory in a preplanned manner transformed into a complex operation that faced considerable obstacles: the Cold War, Pan-Arabism, and midcentury decolonialization. The Aden Emergency was the denouement of a decades-long British endeavor to combine diplomatic efforts, military training, and economic development in an attempt to create a stable country for eventual inclusion in the British Commonwealth. During this time period, the British had to contend with two competing insurgency forces, the Egyptian-supported National Liberation Front, as well as the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen. Despite tactical and operational success in the Aden Emergency, British -military forces were never able completely to defeat the insurgency, compounded by the fact that the British-trained Aden Army eventually mutinied against the British. The British government soon left Aden earlier than the planned withdrawal date of 1968, instead leaving in 1967, failing to establish a sustainable, democratic political regime, or create lasting political institutions, in the colony of Aden and the Aden Protectorate.

PURPOSE OF THE CASE

The purpose of this case is to expose students to the numerous issues related to the concept of nation-building as a complex operation. This case is presented from numerous perspectives and is written in a manner that provides the student with excerpts of many of the policy documents used to devise and execute British strategy in the Aden context in the 1950s and 1960s. The learning objectives of this case study may include the following:

- Educating students about the difficulty of implementing constitution-based governance in non-western states;
- Placing stability operations (in this case, the transfer of power from a foreign entity to a domestic polity) within the context of systemic and regional conflict; and

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- Demonstrating the relationship between domestic politics and the assistance and/or hindrance to foreign policy objectives.

This case study could be applicable for students interested in foreign policy decision-making, international relations, stability operations/nation-building, Middle East politics, and public management/public policy.

CASE TEACHING PROCESS

This case could be used for an extensive series of lectures, employing the numerated steps below as a focus for each class. Alternatively, the instructor could focus one class on the foreign policy debate (referred to as “Step #5” below) as a standalone practical exercise that highlights many of the themes and dilemmas in the case. An extensive teaching of the case could contain the following:

Step #1: Geography of the Case

The intent of utilizing this case is to force students into the role of the decision makers formulating policy in Aden. Maximizing the utility of this case is heavily dependent on the students’ knowledge of geopolitics and the strategic importance of Aden. Instructors should have on hand a brief series of maps to illustrate how Aden fit into the broader picture of the British Empire. It is recommended that the following maps be used to geographically “frame the case” for the students:

- A map of the British Empire’s “East of Suez” zone of responsibility in the immediate aftermath of World War II (Map 1);
- A map of the Middle East and North Africa, circa 1963 (Map 2); and
- A map of Southwest Arabia that reflects Aden Colony, the West Aden Protectorate, the East Aden Protectorate, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, prior to the withdrawal of the British in 1967 (Map 3).

Students could be preassigned- the responsibility of briefing the class about why the strategic location of Aden is important to the case, as opposed to the instructor giving a lecture.

Step #2: Systemic and Regional Factors

It is important that the students embed their interpretation of the case within the context of systemic and regional trends that in many ways influenced the direction of British nation-building efforts. The major trends that should be identified and discussed in this step include the following:

- *The Cold War:* Students should have a basic grasp of what the Cold War was and why it is relevant in this case. The instructor can ask very basic questions to ensure the class has an understanding of this topic:
 - What was the Cold War? What was it about?
 - Who were the relevant actors? Where did the British sit on the issue?
 - How was the Cold War playing out in the Middle East?
- *Arab Nationalism:* Students should possess a basic understanding of what Arab nationalism was and why it is relevant to the case. The instructor could ask general questions, to include:
 - What was Arab nationalism? What were its main political connotations?
 - Who in the Arab world viewed himself as the leader of the Arab nationalist movement?
- *Decolonialization:* Following World War II, many European powers began to lose their control of various colonies, voluntarily in some instances, in force by others. Students need to understand what this decolonialization process meant and why it was relevant to these states, chiefly Britain. Student could be asked:
 - What is decolonialization?
 - What were the major factors determining this process?

Step #3: Identifying the Actors

Following a discussion of the significant trends that frame the British efforts in Aden, the instructor should ask the students to identify the major stakeholders/actors, and state what the respective actors' preferred "end state" in Aden was/should be (NOTE: This should include the views of non-British actors as well, such as the United Nations, Nasser, competing insurgency groups, etc.). The class should, at a minimum, identify the following as relevant actors and their views:

Actor	Preferred Outcome in Case
British Conservative Party	Some level of political autonomy for Aden Colony; continued use of Aden as military staging area for strategic operations
British Labour Party	Complete withdrawal from Aden; closure of Aden base and complete withdrawal of all British military forces "East of Suez"

Gamel Abdul Nasser	British withdrawal from Aden; addition of Aden into larger Egyptian sphere of influence in Middle East/North Africa
National Liberation Front	Complete defeat and withdrawal of British forces from Aden and the Protectorates; defeat of the Federation of South Arabia; defeat of competing insurgency groups; imposition of a Marxist-based government for all of Aden and the Protectorates
Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen	Complete defeat and withdrawal of British forces from Aden and the Protectorates; defeat of the Federation of South Arabia; defeat of competing insurgency groups
South Arabian League	Independent “Aden State” that includes the Aden Colony and both the East and West Aden Protectorates; complete British withdrawal from Aden Colony and the Protectorates
Sir William Luce	Independent “Aden State” that includes the Aden Colony and both the East and West Aden Protectorates; complete British withdrawal from Aden Colony and the Protectorates
Yemeni minority	Inclusion in governing institution; eventual union of Aden and Yemen

Step #4: Debate and Policy Rationalizations

This step should represent the core of the case study discussion. The instructor should split the class in half and assign each group into either the “Conservative Party” or the “Labour Party.” Each group will be asked to consider the three options proposed by Sir William Luce, the governor of Aden in 1956. Then they should select and defend the option they feel is best, outline their major policy planning concerns, and justify their respective position on the nation-building enterprise in Aden. As stated in the case, Luce’s recommended options were as follows:

- Retain Aden Colony indefinitely.
- Withdraw early from Aden.

- Disengage gradually from Southwest Arabia.

The purpose of this debate is to allow the students to see the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy and to demonstrate that there was no “right answer” in the British experience in Aden.

Step #5: Analysis of Dilemmas and Conclusion

Following the debate, the instructor should ask the groups what they would view as any other options the British government could have taken with respect to Aden. Discussing these options should inform the groups’ ability to draw out the following dilemmas from the case study:

- How does a western power create lasting political institutions while strategically disengaging from the theater of operations?
- How are electoral systems developed for states that have no experience with democracy?
- How do governments balance the financial needs of maintaining global strategic forces while at the same time funding costly domestic social programs?
- How does the government reconcile the basic incompatibility between the desire for military facilities in South Arabia and the policy of creating a viable state to hand over to at independence?
- How can tribal orientations be reconciled with conceptualizations of centralized governments?
- How is a chain of command clearly defined that includes diplomatic, colonial, and military organizations?

Students should come away from the case study with the following take aways/implications:

- Failure of incorporating allied regional actors in the stability process leads to capacity-building failures in states with weak institutions.
- Tying the end of transition operations to announced withdrawal dates, as opposed to solid, tangible governance gains, may have the effect of empowering opposition forces, and to consolidate and “wait out” foreign and central government forces during a counterinsurgency campaign,. Is this a necessary risk?
- State capacity-building can be undermined when local political interests are not included or adequately addressed in the constitutional drafting process.

- Domestic political realities may prevent potentially successful outcomes of complex operations if there is a strategic disconnect between upper-level elected officials and career civil service professionals.
- Having discussed the British experience in Aden, write a two-page paper applying the dilemmas in step 6 to a present-day situation.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE MATERIALS

Instructors utilizing this case could assign students readings from the following works to augment their understanding of the case study:

Hyam, Ronald. 2006. *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. This book provides readers with a detailed history of all the major and minor events in the British decolonization process, to include Aden. This book would provide students with a detailed insight into the domestic political machinations occurring within the British government and the interplays between the competing Labour and Conservative parties.

Hinchcliffe, Peter, John T. Ducker, and Maria Holt. 2006. *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden*. New York: Tauris & Co Ltd. The authors of this book do an admirable job of framing the story of Aden from varying levels of analysis in the first few chapters and then spend the remainder of the book cataloguing the oral histories of many of the various players in the case study. The first two chapters serve as an excellent primer for students unfamiliar with the historical and strategic context.

Gavin, R. J. 1975. *Aden Under British Rule: 1839–1967*. London, UK: C. Hurst & Co, Ltd. Excellent historical work that provides very detailed information about the British efforts in Aden.

Petersen, Tore T. 2006. *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East: 1961–1969*. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press. The book provides readers with the larger Cold War backdrop that frames much of the Aden case study. This book demonstrated the difficulties the British and the Americans had in formulating and implementing a coherent strategy in the Middle East to deter Soviet influence and maintain strategic flexibility in the region.

Pieragostini, Karl. 1991. *Britain, Aden, and South Arabia*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Easily readable book that looks at the British experience in Aden from differing perspectives.

Jones, Clive. 2004. *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1965*. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press. For students who are interested in Britain's involvement in the Yemen civil war, this book is an excellent resource.

In addition to the aforementioned books, the following films and documentaries are valuable resources while utilizing this case:

Mad Mitch and the Last Battle of the British Empire. BBC Documentary, November 2007. This documentary examines the controversial counterinsurgency methods used by Lt. Col. Colin Mitchell, commander of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders during the Battle of Crater in Aden in 1967. While tactically successful, the methods used by “Mad Mitch” have been a controversial topic for decades. Instructors could use this documentary to demonstrate many of the dilemmas western militaries face while conducting counterinsurgency operations.

A History of Britain: Episode XIV, The Empire of Good Intentions. BBC Documentary, 2000. While not commenting on Aden, this episode of the series examines many of the colonization dilemmas faced by the British government during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Lord Mountbatten: The Last Viceroy, 1986. Six-part mini-series that demonstrates the challenges faced by the last viceroy of the British Raj, prior to the independence of India and the partition of the Raj into India and Pakistan. While this series does not comment on Aden, it does illustrate many of the challenges faced during a decolonization experience.