

# **Britain and the Development of Professional Security Forces in the Gulf Arab States, 1921-71: Local Forces and Informal Empire**

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## Abstract

Imperial powers have employed a range of strategies to establish and then maintain control over foreign territories and communities. As deploying military forces from the home country is often costly – not to mention logistically stretching when long distances are involved – many imperial powers have used indigenous forces to extend control or protect influence in overseas territories. This study charts the extent to which Britain employed this method in its informal empire among the small states of Eastern Arabia: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the seven Trucial States (modern day UAE), and Oman before 1971.

Resolved in the defence of its imperial lines of communication to India and the protection of mercantile shipping, Britain first organised and enforced a set of maritime truces with the local Arab coastal shaikhs of Eastern Arabia in order to maintain peace on the sea. Throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, the primary concern in the Gulf for the British, operating through the Government of India, was therefore the cessation of piracy and maritime warfare. Later, British interests were expanded to suppressing the activities of slave traders and arms traffickers. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain also sought to exclude foreign powers from gaining a foothold in the area. It was during this time that the British government assumed full responsibility for the external relations of these shaikhdoms and that Britain conferred the status of 'protected state' upon them. Up to this point, when Britain needed to protect these interests or use force to compel local rulers to comply with its wishes, naval power usually sufficed.

By the midpoint of the twentieth century, Britain's interests in the area had swelled and migrated inland – first because of the establishment of air stations servicing the imperial route to India, then as a result of oil exploration and production. At the same time, growing international opposition to colonialism and a steady reduction in Britain's ability to project military power overseas made it more and more difficult for Britain to discharge its security duties in the Gulf. So how did Britain bridge this gap?

Studies of British security policy towards the Gulf have focused almost exclusively on Britain's formal military architecture. Using India Office records and

British Government archival documents, this study provides a reinterpretation of the means by which Britain sought to maintain order, protect its interests in the region and discharge its defence obligations. The records, it will be shown, point to a broad British policy before 1971 of enhancing the coercive instruments available to the local rulers. Rather than having to revert to using its own military forces, Britain wanted the Gulf rulers to acquire a monopoly over the use of force within their territories and to be in a stronger position to defend their own domains against cross-border raiders and covetous neighbours. This policy was not always successful; Britain was progressively drawn into the internal security affairs of a number of ITS protégés, especially after the Second World War.

The security forces that emerged – armed police forces, gendarmeries and militaries – varied considerably, as did Britain’s involvement in their establishment and running. Nevertheless, taken as whole, a trend emerges between 1921 and 1971 of Britain pushing the Gulf states to take over more and more of the security burden. Indeed, at a time when its traditional sources of global power were fading, indigenous security forces were an important tool in Britain’s pursuit of its interests before its military withdrawal from the Gulf in December 1971. This aspect of Britain’s approach to security in the Gulf has largely been overlooked.

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## Abbreviations

ADDF	Abu Dhabi Defence Force
AIOC	Anglo-Iraq Oil Company
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APL	Aden Protectorate Levies
BDF	Bahrain Defence Force
BNG	Bahrain National Guard
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CID	Committee for Imperial Defence
CSAF	Commander Sultan's Armed Forces
DDF	Dubai Defence Force
DIO	Desert Intelligence Officer
GOCMELF	General Officer Commanding Middle East Land Forces
GOI	Government of India
HQLFPG	Headquarters Land Forces, Persian Gulf
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KAF	Kuwait Armed Force
KLT	Kuwait Liaison Team
LDC (PG)	Local Defence Committee, Persian Gulf
LST	Landing Ship (Tank)
MCC (PG)	Military Coordination Committee, Persian Gulf
MI	Muscat Infantry
MLC	Muscat Levy Corps
MOFF	Muscat and Oman Field Force
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NFR	Northern Frontier Regiment
PA	Political Agent
PDO	Petroleum Development Oman
PO	Political Officer
RAKMF	Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force

RAF	Royal Air Force
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SAOPG	Senior Army Office, Persian Gulf
SAS	Special Air Service
SNG	Sharjah National Guard
SNOPG	Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf
SOAF	Sultan of Oman's Air Force
SON	Sultan of Oman's Navy
SSO	Special Service Officers
TOL	Trucial Oman Levies
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Historiography: Perspectives on Britain's Security Policy in the Gulf before 1971

Once considered an obscure area of the world to study, the Gulf now commands global attention in both academic and policy-orientated circles.<sup>1</sup> As part of this region, the small Arab monarchies of Eastern Arabia (present day Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman<sup>2</sup>) exhibit a combination of historical and political conditions that bind them as a group and set them apart from their neighbours. One of the strongest of these conditions is their experience as part of Britain's informal empire on the western flank of the Raj. During the course of the nineteenth century the British integrated these states into its imperial system, and in the twentieth century set out to modernise them. What little state infrastructure they developed, including their fledgling security forces, were organised and run along British lines. These twentieth-century efforts to build-up the coercive state instruments were in Britain's interests. Indeed, local security forces were an important component of British security policy in the region.

To date, the literature on the origins and evolution of Britain's security role in the Gulf has concentrated on the formal trappings of power, i.e. the maintenance in the area of British fighting units. This is unsurprising, as Britain's ability to project military force underlay its privileged position in the Gulf historically and in the treaty system. Apart from a brief experiment to station an Indian Army detachment in 1820-22, Britain's coercive strength in the area was exercised through its navies. When treaties were not adhered to, British gunboats bombarded coastal forts and settlements to deter future recalcitrance. A single strong display of naval power more often than not rendered repeated demonstrations unnecessary – at least for a time. From the 1920s onwards, however, there was greater need to maintain order in the interior of the states that made up its informal empire in the Gulf. The British could either increase their own military presence on land or build-up the capabilities of their

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<sup>1</sup> For an exploration of the trends in the literature refer to J.E. Peterson's paper, 'The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey of Recent Publications,' presented at the Gulf/2000 history conference in Sharjah, UAE in 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Oman is referred to as Muscat and Oman before 1970 and before 1956 as Muscat State (for the area under Sultanate control) and Oman (for the interior under Imamate control).

shaikhly allies. Britain experimented with both options and in the end adopted a mixture of the two.

A number of historians have explained how Britain adapted its formal defence architecture to protect its growing interests in the region. In *Defending Arabia* (1986) J.E. Peterson, charts the growing involvement of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in British defence plans for the Middle East in the early 1920s. He makes it clear that whilst there was no immediate requirement to station a permanent RAF squadron in the Gulf, this changed in the 1930s with the establishment of air installations at Muharraq Island (Bahrain), Sharjah (Trucial Coast), and Masirah Island (Oman) and Salalah (Oman).<sup>3</sup> Historian Nicholas Stanley-Price has published a recent monograph on the British airfield in Sharjah that, like Peterson's account, explains the reason for this RAF presence in the area – the protection of the imperial air route to India.<sup>4</sup> A number of studies have charted the wax and wane of Britain's military presence in the region after the Second World War when, due to rapidly expanding oil interests, Britain paid greater attention to the security of the area. Philip Darby's book *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-68* (1973) provided the first full account of the evolution of Britain's military position in the Gulf after Indian independence. In *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region* (2010), Jeffrey Macris has provided an up-to-date account using a range of archival and secondary sources. He maps Britain's evolving formal defence arrangements and how this interacted with the United States increasing involvement (and presence) in the region.<sup>5</sup>

These studies tell us that, from 1950s until withdrawal in 1971, Britain garrisoned troops in Bahrain and Sharjah and kept, at different times, RAF air platforms for reconnaissance, transport and ground attack. This local military presence was augmented by 'out-of-theatre' forces that could be flown in from Iraq, Aden, Kenya, Libya, Cyprus and Britain. From the end of the 1950s to British withdrawal in 1971, the *raison d'être* for this military edifice was for the protection of Kuwait. A number of studies have looked at how Britain deterred Iraq from making a

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<sup>3</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Defending Arabia* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 18-63.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Stanley-Price, *Imperial Outpost in the Gulf: The Airfield at Sharjah (UAE), 1932-1952* (Brighton, UK: The Book Guild, 2013), esp. pp. 13-28 and 65-87.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region* (London: Routledge, 2010).

military move against its oil-rich neighbour to the south.<sup>6</sup> The British pull out from South Arabia in 1967 led to a short-lived expansion of Britain's military presence in the Gulf.

The formal British military presence is, however, only part of the story; Britain pressured, cajoled and encouraged the small states to form centralised security forces between 1921 and 1971. These indigenous forces, which came into being at different times and took on different shapes, became an important part of Britain's security strategy in the region. That this aspect of British policy has largely been neglected in almost all studies of the period is a deficiency that requires rectifying. To be sure, some scholars have touched on British involvement in the origins and development of some of the individual security forces of the Gulf states, with the Omani military receiving most attention.<sup>7</sup> J.E. Peterson's book, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (2007) is the best example. It includes a comprehensive depiction of the evolution of the Omani military and, as a result, the role Britain played in its development.<sup>8</sup> Peterson also contends in his earlier work, *Defending Arabia*, that:

Without doubt, the major factor in the SAF's [Sultan's Armed Forces] modernisation was the guidance and manifold assistance provided by Britain. Not only had London prodded Sultan Said into taking the first steps to move his armed forces into the twentieth century, but it also provided financial assistance and arms. Just as importantly, the SAF benefited from a considerable number of seconded officers and even more contract personnel, both civilian and ex-military.<sup>9</sup>

The recent resurgence of professional military and scholarly interest in counter-insurgency has led to several studies of British succour to Sultanate forces during the Dhofar Rebellion (1965-75).<sup>10</sup> Political scientist Walter C. Ladwig III is one

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<sup>6</sup> Richard A. Mobley, 'Deterring Iraq: The UK Experience,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2001), pp. 55-82.

<sup>7</sup> For a background to the formation of the Omani intelligence services, see: Dale F. Eickelman and M.G. Dennison, 'Arabizing the Omani Intelligence Services: Clash of Cultures?,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1994), pp. 1-28.

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (Saqi, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Geraint Hughes, 'A 'Model Campaign' Reappraised: The Counter-Insurgency War in Dhofar, Oman, 1965-1975,' *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April, 2009), pp.

scholar who has also identified British security assistance as the key element in Sultan's ability to confront the rebels in the restive Dhofar province.<sup>11</sup>

The only other locally raised force in the Gulf to receive any attention is the British-run Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS),<sup>12</sup> which operated in Trucial Oman / the Trucial States (the present day UAE). As an organisation, the TOS was *sui generis*, inasmuch that, unlike all other local forces in the Gulf, it was under the direct authority of the Political Resident (Britain's most senior representative in the region) and was paid for *in toto* by the British taxpayer. To date, writing on the TOS has not moved beyond memoirs of its former British personnel and monographs following in the tradition of regimental histories.<sup>13</sup> Scant attempt has been made to place the TOS within the context of British policy in the Gulf. Immediately outside of the Gulf, there are a number of studies of other British-run Arab forces. These reveal that the use of local forces in the Gulf by Britain to advance its interests was a wider phenomenon.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, scholars seeking to understand British security policy in the Gulf before 1971 have hitherto not placed sufficient emphasis in exploring why Britain put so much time into developing local instruments for internal coercion and defence from external enemies. At the time of Britain's exit from the Gulf in December 1971,

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271-305; Walter C. Ladwig III, 'Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (March, 2008), pp. 62-88; Ian Gardiner, *In the Service of the Sultan: A First Hand Account of the Dhofar Insurgency* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2008); John Pimlott, 'The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign, 1970-75,' in Ian Becket and John Pimlott (eds.), *Armed Forces and Modern Counter Insurgency* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> See in particular: Walter C. Ladwig III, 'Security Assistance and Counterinsurgency: The British Experience in Oman, 1964-1975,' in Kendall Gott (ed.), *Security Assistance: U.S. and International Historical Perspectives* (Leavenworth, KS: CSI Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Before 1956 they were called the Trucial Oman Levies.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Mann, *The Trucial Oman Scouts: The Story of a Bedouin Force* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994); Peter Clayton, *Alpha Two Lima: The First Ten Years of the Trucial Oman Levies and Trucial Oman Scouts* (London: Janus Publishing, 1999); Anthony Cawston and Michael Curtis, *Arabian Days: Memoirs of Two Trucial Oman Scouts* (Michael Curtis, 2010); Tom Walcot, 'The Trucial Oman Scouts, 1955 to 1971: An Overview,' *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2006), pp. 17-30.

<sup>14</sup> Cliff Lord and David Birtles, *The Armed Forces of Aden 1839-1967* (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2000); Frank Edwards, *The Gaysh: A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies, 1927-61 and the Federal Regular Army of South Arabia 1963-67* (Solihull, UK: Helion 2004); and James Lunt's chapters on the Iraq Levies, the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force, the Arab Legion, the Trucial Oman Scouts, the Sultan's Armed Forces, Aden Protectorate Levies, and the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion in *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Macdonald Fontura, 1981).

all of small Gulf Arab monarchies had built up sizeable security forces with British assistance. Yet we know very little, beyond the abovementioned exceptions, about Britain's role in forming, developing and, in many cases, running these forces. If the aim of British Gulf security policy in the twentieth century was the maintenance of order and the territorial status quo of its protégés, then whether or not Britain used local forces as proxies to advance these interests is a question that needs to be tackled.

## 1.2 Theory: Local Security Forces and Imperialism

At its root, imperialism, as an idea and a process, denotes a relationship of dominion. This incursion of one power into the sovereignty of another, however, can take on many forms.<sup>15</sup> In Charles Reynolds' telling, the interaction between an imperial power and weaker state can be explicit (political sovereignty asserted by force over subject peoples) or implicit (a system of control and restraint exercised over peoples and territories).<sup>16</sup> If imperialism can occur across a spectrum – with loose supervision of intermediaries at one end and tight top-down control at the other – then it stands to reason that the methods used to establish and maintain this subordination will also vary. Indeed, this line of thinking forms the central theme of Jane Burbank and Fredrick Cooper's recent book, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (2011), in which they argue that different empires have employed different repertoires for projecting power.<sup>17</sup>

Many scholars have accredited the success of European territorial expansion since the late fifteenth century to the harnessing of superior technologies and the professionalization of military forces. Yet European powers could probably not have made these gains without the use of local manpower.<sup>18</sup> When it came to the Raj, for

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Reynolds, *Modes of Imperialism* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Jane Burbank and Fredrick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (NY: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> On the how the Western European states harnessed new technologies for military advantage refer to Daniel R. Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since a.d. 1000* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982); and Geoffrey Parker, *The Military*

example, the British could not have taken control over large parts of India without local allies. From the beginning, the English East India Company raised its forces used for expanding its presence almost entirely by recruiting from India's traditional military labour markets.<sup>19</sup> As David Killingray has aptly observed: 'For reasons of cost, and because of the difficulties of employing European soldiers in tropical campaigns, most colonial powers sought to recruit 'native armies'.<sup>20</sup>

Also, because post-conquest subject peoples proved difficult wards, imperial powers were required to establish effective means of internal control to suppress revolts and deal with unrest. Imperial governments were, however, reluctant to commit metropolitan resources to empire; dispatching a fleet or army from the home country could be costly and logistically taxing. Those delegated with the authority for managing imperial interests in overseas territory usually had few military means at their disposal as a result.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the need to call for military resources from the imperial government was seen as a failure.

Throughout history and across geography imperial powers have used subjected people to maintain order in newly conquered territory, raising auxiliaries from among indigenous populations or utilising existing forces as proxies. Like the Aztecs, who maintained their empire with great economy of force, Britain also relied on local resources for security and order.<sup>22</sup> This strategy had its drawbacks. Although

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*Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Douglas M. Peers, 'Revolution, Evolution of Devolution: The Military and the Making of Colonial India,' in Wayne E. Lee (ed.) *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York, New York University Press, 2011), pp. 82 and 98-9; Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 1; and T. R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> David Killingray, 'Introduction' to David Killingray and David Omissi (eds.) *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of Colonial Powers, c. 1700-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 7. See also, Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> R. Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,' in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 117-42 reprinted in Wm. Roger Louis (ed.), *The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (London: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 142-3.

<sup>22</sup> Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 19. On Britain's use of local manpower to police the empire see in particular David Killingray and David Omissi (1999); and T.R. Moreman, 'Small Wars and Imperial Policing: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial

indigenous recruits were cheaper and healthier, there was always a question mark over their reliability. The sepoy revolt of 1857 for instance meant that metropolitan troops would be garrisoned in India (until 1947) at a strength whereby they could extinguish any future uprising by local soldiery.<sup>23</sup>

Imperial powers often took the use of local forces in conquered territory a step further, deploying them to fight in other parts of the empire. The Roman Empire, for example, recruited conquered people into an *auxilia* that was organised into cavalry or light infantry cohorts. These non-citizen soldiers complemented the traditional legionary forces in far-flung parts of the Roman Empire.<sup>24</sup> Returning to the British, David Omissi has argued that:

The empire could never have depended upon its white soldiers alone [. . .] British soldiers cost far more than those raised from the indigenous population. The empire therefore obtained much of its military manpower from local sources. It was easier and cheaper to dominate the world if Asians and Africans could be induced to shoulder much of the white man's burden.<sup>25</sup>

Indian troops especially were used in the nineteenth century as an imperial 'fire brigade', dealing, as Killingray notes, 'with crises from China to Africa.'<sup>26</sup> Moreover, manpower from India and other colonies was utilised extensively by Britain in the campaigns on the Nile (1880s), the South Africa War (1899-1902) and both World Wars.<sup>27</sup>

Wayne E. Lee concludes in his study of Spanish imperial expansion into the Americas: 'if it was possible to convince, cajole, and coerce indigenous agents to harness their own resources in the imperial interest then this was the strategy

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Warfare in the British Empire, 1919-1939.' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 19, Issue 4 (1996), pp. 105-131.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed treatment of the British military as a garrisoning force after 1857, refer to T.A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India, 1600-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> David Killingray and David Omissi (1999), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial Africa Army', *Journal of African History*, Vol. 20 (1979), pp. 421-36.

employed.<sup>28</sup> Using local proxies where possible suited Britain's general approach to imperialism, which the historians Robinson and Gallagher have categorised as 'informal control if possible, formal control if necessary.'<sup>29</sup> First posited more than forty years ago, Robinson's theory of indigenous collaboration remains the most persuasive depiction of how European imperialism worked.<sup>30</sup> The type and level of control Britain adopted across the empire depended to a large degree on the success the British had in attracting local collaborators. The scarcer the imperial resources and the less formal the imperial arrangements, the more the British had to collaborate with elites in an indigenous society and rely on local means for control. Thus in many far-flung places of the world Britain used local intermediaries to extend its hegemony where it would have struggled to enter and stay with its own military force alone. According to Gulf historian James Onley it was 'the collaboration and mediation of indigenous elites in the invaded countries themselves that provided the imperial administrations with their military and administrative muscle.'<sup>31</sup> Onley believes that this paradigm best represents Britain's approach to the Gulf.<sup>32</sup> Here the British succeeded in getting local rulers to collaborate in the pacification of the area and, later, in excluding foreign influences that could threaten its position in India.<sup>33</sup> To be sure, the leading chiefs of the Arab coast were willing to collaborate with Britain only after it achieved maritime dominance in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, when Britain required peace and stability in the interior of the Gulf Arab states, it preferred to develop local coercive instruments under the existing

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<sup>28</sup> Wayne E. Lee 'Projecting Power in the Early Modern World: The Spanish Model?' in *Ibid* (ed.) *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York, New York University Press, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, 'Introduction: Robinson and Gallagher and Their Critics', in *Ibid*. (ed.), *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 2-51; and Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 117-42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> James Onley, 'Britain's Native Agents in Arabia and Persia in the Nineteenth Century,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2004), p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> James Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971,' *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 87 (2005), p. 35. See also Mathew Elliot, "*Independent Iraq*": *The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-58* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), Chapter 5.

<sup>33</sup> James Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971,' *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 87 (2005), p. 42.



political structures rather than use its own forces. The thinking here was that efficient local forces would reduce the need for Britain to intervene with its own troops.

There are myriad reasons why outside powers want to avoid direct military intervention in support of subordinate governments, making the use of local proxies an attractive alternative. Firstly, intervention often degrades the legitimacy of the protégé's government. Secondly, the presence and use of foreign troops might incite the local population. Lastly, intervention in a foreign territory can cause controversy at home for the outside power.<sup>34</sup> It is not too large of a leap to make a connection here with the literature surrounding counter-insurgency practice and theory.<sup>35</sup> In his widely read study comparing British counter-insurgency efforts in Malaya with those of the US in Vietnam, John Nagl makes it explicit that building up the capabilities of local forces is a *sine qua non* for achieving a successful outcome.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the 2006 *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* places great store by training and mentoring of host nation forces is a further indication that building indigenous security capacity continues to be viewed in contemporary strategy as an important way of exercising control or influence in a subordinate state.<sup>37</sup> By using local forces to advance and protect its interests in the Gulf, Britain was employing a time-honoured strategy.

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<sup>34</sup> For a wider discussion on the controversies of foreign deployments, see Robert E. Harkovy, *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Yora Gortzak, 'Using Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations: The French in Algeria, 1954-1962,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, (2009), pp. 307-333; and Richard L. Millett, *Searching for Stability: The US Development of Constabulary Forces in Latin America and the Philippines* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010)

<sup>36</sup> John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), pp. xiv-xv and 99-100. See also: Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (New York: Routledge 2001); and Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> The 2006 *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (*The US Army Field Manual No. 3-24 / Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5*) was first issued in December 2006. It was published by the University of Chicago Press as *The US Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* in 2007. The publication devotes a chapter to the developing Host-Nation security forces. See Chapter 6, pp. 199-236. For a recent treatment of the influence this manual has had on US military doctrine and operations towards the War on Terror refer to Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Patraeus and the Plot to change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon Schuster, 2013).

### 1.3 Epistemology: Sources, Structure and Thematic Threads

All too often social science studies begin with an elegant theory and then search for facts that will confirm it. Another way to conduct analysis is to put the theory after the history, because, according to Francis Fukuyama, 'theories ought to be inferred from facts, and not the other way around.'<sup>38</sup> Towards that end, this study surveys in detail British policy towards security forces by looking in detail at the origins and evolution of the security forces of each of the protected states (and Oman). This is the building blocks upon which the wider arguments advanced in this dissertation are built upon. As so little has been written about the development of the security forces of the Gulf states – let alone their place in British policy before 1971 – this study utilises archival material in London from the India Office Records in the British Library and released British government documents held at the UK National Archives to provide an original narrative. Because this study is looking at how British policy developed over time and across the whole of its informal empire in the Gulf, the chapters are organised chronologically.

Chapter Two (this introduction being the first chapter) provides a contextual examination of the security arrangements before the establishment of local professional security forces. It looks at this matter from the British side and from that of the local rulers.

Chapter Three explores the circumstances surrounding the formation of the first security forces that emerged in the Gulf in the 1920s. At this time, the area was still under the purview of the British Government of India. It shall draw out the reasons why the Raj pressured the Sultan of Muscat and assisted the rulers of Bahrain and Kuwait to replace their previous systems of maintaining authority with professional coercive instruments established on a British model. The chapter then seeks to explain why other parts of Eastern Arabia, namely Qatar and the Trucial States, did not establish security forces.

Chapter Four surveys the increasing importance that local forces played in British security policy in the 1950s. After Indian independence, the Foreign Office assumed responsibility for the Gulf region and began taking greater interest in the internal workings of the Gulf states. At the same time, internal stability took on added importance with growing oil exploration and production activities in the Gulf states.

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<sup>38</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 24.

This chapter charts the formation of the Trucial Oman Levies (called Trucial Oman Scouts after 1956), a force the British government established to police the interior of Trucial Oman / the Trucial States. Where external danger existed (Saudi Arabia towards the Omani interior and Abu Dhabi; Iraq towards Kuwait), Britain helped to build up the defensive capabilities of these threatened states.

Chapter Five reviews the British policy towards local forces between Kuwaiti independence in 1961 and Britain's decision to withdrawal from the Gulf (formerly announced in January 1968). Although electing for independence, Kuwait remained dependent on Britain for its defence. Yet Britain's capability and willingness to intervene militarily decreased in the 1960s. To bridge this gap, Britain sought to assist the Kuwaiti military into becoming a more credible deterrent to Iraq in order to reduce the readiness and size of its own forces committed to Kuwait's defence. In Bahrain and Qatar, Britain centred its policy on building up their police forces in order to deal with civil unrest, some of which was inspired by Arab Nationalism and anti-colonialism. In contrast, Britain's policy in the Trucial States was to discourage the rulers from building their own forces, but to look instead to the British-run TOS as the best means for policing the area.

Chapter Six examines the ways in which Britain built up local forces in the Gulf as it prepared to withdraw its own forces by the end of 1971. By this time Oman was facing a worsening rebellion in its restive southern province of Dhofar. British assistance became the critical factor building up the capabilities of the Sultan's Armed Forces. It will also show that Britain saw the Gulf local forces as a means of preserving British influence in security affairs after 1971.

By revealing the place of local forces in British efforts to maintain order in its informal empire in the Gulf, this study provides a more complete understanding of the nature of Britain's informal empire in Eastern Arabia. Whilst this has stand-alone value, the research findings have a broader application.<sup>39</sup> Several sub-themes, closely related to the overarching research agenda, are weaved through the chapters. The first of these sub-themes is the impact that the creation of security institutions had on the development of the Gulf states. After an initial interest in the 1960s and early 1970s on the role of the security forces in Middle Eastern politics

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<sup>39</sup> The need for broader relevance in historical research is argued persuasively by Marc Trachtenberg in *The Craft of International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 16.

and societies, academic interest in the subject has tapered off.<sup>40</sup> Today the Gulf states maintain complex security apparatus (per capita they are some of the world's largest spenders on defence equipment), but very little work has gone in to exploring how the development of these institutions has affected the societies from which they emerged.<sup>41</sup> Discussing internal security issues of the Gulf states has long been considered an out-of-bounds topic.<sup>42</sup> But another reason for the lack of knowledge about the part security forces have played in the evolution of the Gulf states and the survival strategies of their rulers is because of (a) the dominance of the 'rentier' model in explanations for the durability of these states,<sup>43</sup> and (b) the fact that, as Antonio Giustozzi forcefully argues in his recent book, academics tend not to be inclined to discuss matters of security or state coercion except in order to criticise policymakers.<sup>44</sup>

Another theme explored throughout each chapter is the phenomena of unofficial British influence (i.e. not derived from the British government) and its interaction with official Britain (its representatives, policy, military, etc.). British involvement in local Gulf forces was not limited to state-to-state assistance; there was a plenitude of Britons privately employed by the local rulers operating outside of

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<sup>40</sup> Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1970); S.N. Fisher, *The Military in the Middle East: Problems in Society and Government* (Ohio State University Press, 1963); George Haddad, *Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East, vols. 1-3* (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1965-1973); J. C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1969); Riad N. El-Rayyes and Dunia Nahas (eds.) *Politics in Uniform: A Study of the Military in the Arab World and Israel* (An-Nahar Press Series, 1972); Dankwart Rustow, *The Military in Middle Eastern Politics and Society* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1963).

<sup>41</sup> See Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan, *Gulf Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars*, Vol. 1 (Westport, US: Praeger International Security, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Chapter 10, 'The Military In and Out of Politics,' Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 3<sup>d</sup> edn (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 179. Due to the proliferation of non-Arab media outlets and the intense international interest in the region after September 11 and the invasion of Iraq the dynamics of researching security matters in the Gulf may be changing. See: Lori A. Plotkin, *Kuwait, 1979-1991: Problems and Policies for Internal Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

<sup>43</sup> For indicative examples of this interpretation, see: Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994). For fuller discussion about the rentier state model in the Arab world see Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (eds.) *The Rentier State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> *The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power* (London: Hurst & Co, 2011), p. viii.

British government; sometimes they worked in tandem with British interests, at other times they evoked the frustrations of the Political Resident and his staff.

A final major sub-theme, or question, that this study engages with is that of the transition from Britain's formal defence role that ended in December 1971 to its residual influence in the security affairs of its former protégés. Today Britain still considers itself to have a special position in the small Gulf monarchies of Eastern Arabia, not least in security matters. But how much of this residual role can be traced to the actions Britain took and the decisions it made in the lead up to 1971?

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODS OF CONTROL AND PROTECTION BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL FORCES

### 2.1 British-Enforced Maritime Peace, 1820-57

British interests in the Gulf began with the arrival to the area of the English East India Company (established in 1600), which jostled with its Dutch rival and the Portuguese to establish exclusive trading rights in the area.<sup>45</sup> Between 1622 and 1721, the Portuguese were expelled from all Arab and Persian ports in the area, leaving the Dutch and newly arrived French to compete with the British.<sup>46</sup> Over much of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, British interests in the Gulf were limited to trade and preventing other European powers from establishing a presence. In the late 1790s, an uptick in piracy, combined with heightened Anglo-French rivalry, gave Britain cause to reconsider the level of its involvement in the area.<sup>47</sup>

Raiding and enforced tolling by Arab maritime tribes on Anglo-Indian shipping reached new heights in the early 1800s.<sup>48</sup> In British eyes, the chief perpetrators were the Qawasim (singular Qasimi), a maritime power straddling both sides of the lower Gulf.<sup>49</sup> When in 1808 Qawasim sailors boarded an East India Company cruiser,

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<sup>45</sup> They sought to establish direct maritime trade with the East, circumnavigating the Horn of Africa and bypassing the middlemen controlling the profitable overland Silk Road. See R. B. Sergeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); C.D. Belgrave, 'The Portuguese in the Bahrain Islands (1521-1602)', *Journal of Central Asian Society*, Vol. XXII (1935); and S. Ozbaran, 'The Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf, 1534-1581', *The Journal of Asian History*, vol. 6 (1972).

<sup>46</sup> In 1622, the English assisted the Persians in expelling the Portuguese from the Straits of Hormuz. Although the Portuguese were the first European power the Gulf experienced, 'they left no religious and hardly any cultural imprint, except for their cannons and the ruined forts of their garrisons.' Frauke Head-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (Essex: Longman Group, 1982), p. 271.

<sup>47</sup> This section is indebted to J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>48</sup> In 1805, Qasimi ships seized two merchant vessels owned by the British Resident at Basra and attempted, but failed, to capture an East India Company cruiser. John G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Part 1: *Historical 1A* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1915; reprinted Farnborough: George International Publishers, 1970), pp.181-2.

<sup>49</sup> For accounts on the early development of British involvement in the Gulf, see M.C. Peck, *The United Arab Emirates* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 22-28; and R. M. Savory,

killing many of its crew, the East India Company authorities in Bombay lobbied London to deploy the Royal Navy to the Gulf.<sup>50</sup> In the meantime, Bombay embarked in 1809 on a retributive naval campaign against suspected transgressors.<sup>51</sup> Planning for the operation, however, moved beyond a simple act of punishment. Historian J.F. Standish has shown that a 'grander design was already forming in the minds of the governing council in India.'<sup>52</sup> Naval captains taking part were ordered to reconnoitre suitable islands for establishing a station to command the entrance to the Gulf, providing a base to police piracy and to check French encroachment. Whilst officials in India supported this proposal, the British Government in London calculated that, after the Royal Navy captured the remaining French base in the Indian Ocean in 1810, France no longer posed a threat and so a naval base was no longer necessary.<sup>53</sup>

In the decade that followed, the British Government hemmed and hawed over whether to station a naval contingent in Gulf waters. Without a round-the-clock presence of British warships, the halt in attacks on British shipping which followed the 1809 expedition proved short lived.<sup>54</sup> A further punitive expedition was organised in December 1819. The Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, told the Governor-General of India that after the retributive campaign he intended 'to station as large a marine force in the Gulf as we can spare, with some armed boats for the purpose of visiting different ports, and guarding against any vessels being equipped of a warlike character.'<sup>55</sup> Forces assembled for this second expedition – which, like

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'The History of the Persian Gulf', in A. J. Cottrell (ed.), *The Persian Gulf States – A General Survey* (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp.3-40.

<sup>50</sup> For a general discussion, see James Onley, 'The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century,' *New Arabian Studies* (2004).

<sup>51</sup> In 1809 an eleven ship armada laid siege to the Qasimi capital at Ras al-Khaimah and burned it. Another Qasimi stronghold at Linegh (on the Persian coast) was stormed next. Finally, a joint British-Muscatti fleet captured Shinas on Oman's Batinah coast following a fierce battle. Charles Belgrave, *The Pirate Coast* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1966).

<sup>52</sup> J.F. Standish, 'British Maritime Policy in the Persian Gulf,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (July 1967), p. 327.

<sup>53</sup> In 1810 the East India Company struck an agreement with the Ruler of Muscat to exclude the French from his territory and British forces captured Île de France (thereafter named Mauritius), the last major French base in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>54</sup> Patricia R. Dubuisson, 'Qasimi Piracy and the General Treaty of Peace (1820),' *Arabian Studies*, Vol. 4 (1978), pp. 47-57.

<sup>55</sup> Factory Records (Persia and Persian Gulf) Vol. 34. Elphinstone to Hastings, 15 December 1819. Taken from: J. F. Standish, 'British Maritime Policy in the Persian Gulf,'

the first, included ships from the Sultanate of Muscat – captured the Qawasim headquarters at Ras al-Khaimah town. Smaller parties from the force moved to neighbouring Qawasim ports and towns to accept their submission.<sup>56</sup> The British seized Qishm Island on the Persian Coast in 1820 and retained it as a naval station, garrisoning a small detachment of sepoy to defend it. This first attempt to leave a garrison in the area ended in failure, as the men quickly succumbed to disease.<sup>57</sup> The British were given a second warning against using troops in the area when a force of sepoy from the Qishm garrison,<sup>58</sup> landed in Oman to confront the recalcitrant Bani Bu Ali tribe, was routed.<sup>59</sup> The experiences of 1820-21 convinced the British that they should never station troops in the Gulf again.<sup>60</sup> Fortunately, in safeguarding this key transportation artery to India<sup>61</sup> the ship's cannon was needed more than the sepoy's bayonet.<sup>62</sup>

British Indian officials launched the punitive expeditions of 1809 and 1819-20 to convince the Arab maritime tribes to cease tampering with British shipping on pain of destruction.<sup>63</sup> But this was not the whole substance of the strategy. In 1820, the British proposed a 'General Treaty of Peace with the Arab Tribes' in which signatories would promise to refrain from piracy at sea and to fly a registered flag.

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*Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.3, No.4 (July 1967), p. 327. On the maritime role: R. St Parry, 'The Navy in the Persian Gulf,' *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, Vol.75 (May 1930), pp. 314-31.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1970), pp. 126-30.

<sup>57</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 11; and James Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971,' *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22 No. 87 (Fall 2005), p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> The garrison commander was Captain Perronet.

<sup>59</sup> It took a second force sent out from India in early 1821, combined with the Sultan of Muscat's tribal fighters, to defeat the Bani Bu Ali. Afterwards the main settlements of the Bani Bu Ali were razed and their leaders were imprisoned in Muscat. Peterson (1986), p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> James Onley, 'Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection,' *Occasional Paper*, No. 4 (Center for International and Regional Studies: Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2009), pp. 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> The East India Company and travellers who wished to avoid the long and tedious ocean route preferred the Gulf. Halford L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India* (London: Longmans Green, 1928), pp. 89-96; and Ghulam Idris Khan, 'Attempts at Swift Communication between India and the West before 1830,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1971), pp. 121-36.

<sup>62</sup> See: Anthony Preston and John Major, *Send a Gunboat! A Study of the Gunboat and its Role in British Policy, 1854-1904* (London: Longmans, 1967).

<sup>63</sup> Uzi Rabi, 'Britain's 'Special Position' in the Gulf: Its Origins, Dynamics and Legacy', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (May 2006), p.352



British naval power would act as the guarantor.<sup>64</sup> Officials in India formed a Gulf Squadron from the Bombay Marine (re-named Indian Navy after 1830)<sup>65</sup> to enforce the maritime truce and protect British shipping.<sup>66</sup> Commanded by a Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (SNOGP), the Squadron usually consisted of five to seven ships-of-war.<sup>67</sup> A residency system of Political Agents, Political Officers and Native Agents with a Political Resident at the apex supervised the truces.<sup>68</sup> After the success of the 1820 General Treaty of Peace, a wider Maritime Truce was signed in 1835 with the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, and the Qawasim of Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Lingeh. The Indian Navy patrolled the pearl banks every year during the pearling season. It proved so popular that it was renewed without hesitation year-on-year, and in 1843 the Political Resident agreed to guarantee a ten-year Maritime Truce, which ran without major infraction.<sup>69</sup> This success in turn led to the signing of the Perpetual Maritime Truce in 1853.<sup>70</sup> What British officials had once called the Pirate Coast they now referred to as the 'Trucial Coast'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The texts and the backgrounds to the relevant treaties are found in C.U. Aitchison (Comp.), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Dehli, Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1933), Vol.11.

<sup>65</sup> Anirudh Deshpande, 'The Bombay Marine: Aspects of Maritime History, 1650-1850,' *Studies in History*, Vol. 11 No. 2 (1995). For a further background see G. S. Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean: A Study of Maritime Enterprise, 1810-1850* (Oxford, 1967).

<sup>66</sup> James Onley, (2009) p. 5. For a background to the practice of protecting maritime trade at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, refer to C. Northcote Parkinson's two volumes, *War in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1813* (London, 1954); and *Trade in the Eastern Seas 1793-1813* (London, 1966).

<sup>67</sup> Donald Hastings, *The Royal Indian Navy, 1612-1950* (London: Macfarlane & Co., 1988); Anita Burdett (ed.), *Persian Gulf and Red Sea Naval Reports 1820-1960*, 15 vols. (Slough: Archive Editions, 1993). The Squadron and the SNOGP were headquartered on Qishm Island (1823-1911); then on Henjam Island in the Strait of Hormuz (1911-35); and finally Ras al-Jufair in Bahrain (1935-71). For two years, Qishm Island was also the headquarters of the Lower Gulf Agency, which, after moving to Bushire (where it would remain for over a century), would become the Gulf Residency and the seat of the Political Resident Persian Gulf.

<sup>68</sup> Refer to M. H. Fisher, *Indirect Ruler in India: Residents and Residency System, 1765-1858* (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1992)

<sup>69</sup> In 1836 Umm al-Quwain was admitted. G.S. Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean, 1810-1850* (Oxford, 1967), p. 254.

<sup>70</sup> In 1861 Bahrain was permitted to sign the Perpetual Maritime Truce. Later signatures were Kuwait in 1899 (*de facto* membership), and Qatar in 1916. Muscat, however, was never formally admitted to the Maritime Truce. James Onley, (2009), p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> H. M. Al-Baharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and their International Problems* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975), pp. 47-48.

Although the British Government was obligated to punish intransigents, it avoided whenever possible becoming embroiled in local disputes.<sup>72</sup> This is why the British were reluctant to admit Bahrain to the truce, not doing so until 1861. '[U]nrest within Bahrain and its dependencies and threats to its independence from outside powers,' J.B. Kelly has argued, 'made it virtually certain that the waters around the island would be the scene of almost ceaseless warfare.'<sup>73</sup>

The Government of India had designed the Trucial system as a low-maintenance means of keeping order without constant reversion to the use of force. The naval presence was a deterrent force; that is, it dissuaded those from acting outside the agreed rules of maritime truce by the threat of retaliatory action.<sup>74</sup> In this way, the duty of enforcing the truces concretised British naval dominance in the area.<sup>75</sup> Favouring peace at sea, the coastal rulers entered into the maritime truces voluntarily. As a result, the projection of British power in the Gulf was not as nakedly coercive as in parts of Britain's formal empire. They rarely intervened to stop land warfare and tribal raiding between the Gulf states before the twentieth century. As British interests were offshore, there was little appetite amongst British officials for encouraging the coastal rulers to establish local forces or levies.

## **2.2 Adherence to Treaty Obligations and the Exclusion of Imperial Rivals: British Naval Arrangements, 1858-1911**

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a further step change in British involvement in the Arab coast of the Gulf. When London took direct control of British

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<sup>72</sup> The Sultan of Muscat, the first ruler to be hesitantly granted protection from the Gulf Squadron in 1809. This was despite having already being an ally of Britain's since the signing of the Anglo-Omani treaty of friendship in 1798. It is interesting to note that the protection remained on an *ad hoc* footing until a formal defence agreement was signed with Oman in 1958.

<sup>73</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 379-80. Bahrain went to war with Abu Dhabi (1839) for harbouring a breakaway tribe; the Ruler, Shaikh Abdullah, was deposed (1843) by a confederate of family members; and Bahrain knocked back an invasion (1854) by the forces of Feisal ibn Turki of Najd who had allied with tribes formerly loyal to the Ruler.

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion on the differences between deterrence and compellence, see Robert J. Art, 'To What Ends Military Power?' *International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (1980), pp. 3-35. The term 'compellence' was coined by Thomas C. Schelling in *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966)

<sup>75</sup> Hussein M. al-Baharna, 'The Consequences of Britain's Exclusive Treaties: A Gulf View', in B. R. Pridham (ed.), *The Arab Gulf and the West* (London: Croom Helm for the Centre of Arab Gulf Studies, Exeter University), p. 23.

affairs in India after the 1857 Mutiny, the future of the naval contingent in the Gulf was rendered uncertain. Indeed, at the end of 1862, the British Government recalled the vessels of the Indian Navy assigned to the Gulf Squadron back to India.<sup>76</sup> This was contrary to the recommendation of the Political Resident, Pelly, who called in 1863 for the relocation of the Gulf Squadron – and the Residency – to the natural anchorage of Khasab at the tip of the Musandam Peninsula. Deep enough to accommodate the growing number of steamships plying the nearby waters, and sitting at one of the narrowest points of the Straits of Hormuz, Khasab was for Pelly the ideal location for settling and deterring disputes between coastal Arabs and suppressing the slave trade. Despite the added British aim of intercepting ships carrying slaves, under new arrangements the East Indies Station of the Royal Navy assumed the duties of the Indian Navy in the Gulf, but it stationed no ships in the Gulf and only sent ships when the need was urgent.<sup>77</sup> This change deprived the Political Resident of a dedicated vessel (though the introduction of the Bombay to Basra mail steamer from 1862 and telegraph-laying ships did provide the Resident with some much needed logistical support).<sup>78</sup> According to the official chronicler, John Lorimer, this affected Britain's ability to maintain order:

The chief disadvantages of the new system were that, owing to the extent of the East Indian naval station and the relatively small strength in ships of the East Indian Squadron, it frequently happened that no vessel was at hand when required; that, calls upon ships from different quarters being numerous, no vessel could remain long in one place; that the officers were, by traditions and training, less suitable for the performance of political duties than their predecessors of the Indian Navy; and finally that, as the officers and vessels belonged to a Royal instead of local force, their services could not be so freely requisitioned by the political authorities.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This was in preparation for disbanding the Indian Navy. On 30 April 1863, officials at Bombay hauled down the Indian Navy's flag, and the service ceased to exist.

<sup>77</sup> Lorimer (1915), p. 248. Khasab was also an important relay station for the British telegraph to India. Interests on the western littoral had graduated beyond the suppression of piracy. See Christina Phelps Harris, 'The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 135, No. 2 (Jun., 1969), p. 175.

<sup>78</sup> Lorimer (1915), p. 248.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

In the mid-1860s, Pelly complained that even though the slave trade was in full vigour, he lacked the means to intercept slaving craft.<sup>80</sup> He was powerless, for want of a suitable means of locomotion, to perform his function as arbitrator of disputes arising among the chiefs on the Arab coast. Furthermore, the Admiralty forbade ships of the Royal Navy to ply the Gulf waters during the pearling season (April to October) – precisely when disputes were most frequent.<sup>81</sup> The Resident's fear that for lack of ships the Gulf would revert to its natural state of insecurity seemed to be borne out by subsequent events.

After a heavy attack by the Al Khalifah and their allies from Bahrain on Al Thani controlled towns on the Qatari peninsula in October 1867, the first British vessel was not able to arrive on the scene until the following May.<sup>82</sup> In response to the earlier attack the Al Thani sent its fleet to Bahrain in June 1868. Sixty ships were reportedly lost and over a thousand Bahraini and Qatari sailors killed in the ensuing sea battle. Not until August did the Royal Navy's HMS *Vigilant* reach the area to carry out reactive and punitive operations.<sup>83</sup> The Political Resident appealed to the Government of India to put at his direct disposal a vessel sufficiently armed and built with all the modern fittings and improvements of the English Dockyard so that he had the means to enforce peace.<sup>84</sup>

It is unclear whether the events of 1867-8 directly led to a rethink of the existing naval arrangements, but the following year the Government of India agreed to subsidise the Royal Navy presence in India. In return, the Admiralty agreed to appropriate six vessels from the Royal Navy's East India Squadron for special service under the Government of India control. Three of the six ships were to be steam gun vessels or gunboats and were detached for constant and exclusive use in the Gulf.<sup>85</sup> The officer in command of the flotilla was to consider himself under the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp. 248-9.

<sup>82</sup> Her Majesty's Indian Navy reverted to the name Bombay Marine in 1863. In 1877 it became Her Majesty's Indian Marine.

<sup>83</sup> In September 1868, the British destroyed the prominent Bahraini fort at Abu Mahir and put fire to its dhow fleet.

<sup>84</sup> Lorimer (1915), p. 249.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 250. A list of British vessels employed in the Persian Gulf from 1863 to 1905 can be found in J.A. Saldanha's, *Précis on Naval Arrangements in the Persian Gulf, 1862-1905* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1906).

authority of the Political Resident, underscoring the politico-military role of Britain's senior representative.<sup>86</sup>

While the Perpetual Maritime Truce of May 1853 provided the Government of India with the right to enforce maritime tranquillity, it did not preclude the shaikhdoms from entering into agreements with outside powers. With Persia, the Ottoman Empire, France, Germany, and Russia<sup>87</sup> showing increasing interest in Gulf towards the end of the nineteenth century, Britain felt impelled to consolidate and upgrade its political relationships with coastal shaikhs of Eastern Arabia. The local rulers signed Exclusive Agreements, binding them into even tighter treaty relations with, and ceding control of their external affairs to, the British Crown. These were signed by the Ruler of Bahrain in 1880 and 1892, the rulers of the Trucial States in 1888 and 1892, the Ruler of Kuwait in 1899, the Saudi ruler of Najd and Hasa in 1915 (annulled in 1927), and finally the Ruler of Qatar in 1916. In return, Britain bound itself to defend their territorial integrity and the status of protected state was conferred upon them.<sup>88</sup> The Sultan of Muscat signed a similar Exclusive Agreement in 1891, which recognised his pre-existing diplomatic relations with France and America, but his relationship with the British government was just as close as any Arab shaikhdom further up the coast.<sup>89</sup>

At the century's turn, the Gulf was more than ever considered by London to be a 'British lake'. Resolved in protecting the western flank of India, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, declared to the House of Lords in 1903 that

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<sup>86</sup> The resurrected Gulf Squadron could not undertake hostile without the direction of the Political Resident. Importantly, the general service rule under which hostilities could not be undertaken without reference to the Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Squadron was relaxed with reference to the Gulf in light of the peculiar circumstances of the Gulf.

<sup>87</sup> See in particular M. A. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1987), pp. 647-665. For a more general overview on British fears regarding the threat from Russia refer to Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> J.B. Kelly, 'The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf', *St. Anthony's Papers*, No. 4: *Middle Eastern Affairs*, No. 1 (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1958) pp. 135-6; and Onley (2009), p. 10. The most important treaties between Great Britain and the Gulf States are listed in The National Archives [TNA] FO 371/156674, 'Relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Rulers of the Persian Gulf States: List of Principal Agreements', August 1961.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between influence and military power see: Lawrence Freedman, 'Military Power and Political Influence,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Oct. 1998) pp. 763-79. See also John Vincent, *Military Power and Political Influence: the Soviet Union and Western Europe*, *Adelphi Paper No. 119* (London: IISS, 1975).

Britain 'should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests [. . .].'<sup>90</sup> As the Exclusive Agreements forbade those who signed to 'sell, cede, mortgage or otherwise give for occupation' any part of their territory, except to the British Government, Britain was in effect creating a *cordon sanitaire* for the approaches to British India. Britain surged its naval presence again in 1909 in an effort to intercept local dhows involved in smuggling arms that eventually found their way to India's Northwest Frontier and Afghanistan.<sup>91</sup> Dubai and Ajman were believed in particular to being used by the French and other merchants to ship 200 rifles a month to India. After a Royal Navy landing party searching for a weapons cache in Dubai was attacked by the local inhabitants on Christmas Eve 1910,<sup>92</sup> Britain demanded that the Ruler Shaikh Butti bin Suhail (r. 1906-12) agree to station a British Political Officer in the town and to permit a guard force of sepoy for his dignity and personal protection.<sup>93</sup> Britain later dropped these demands, but extended the idea of deploying detachments of sepoy to Bahrain and Muscat, which accepted the presence of these Indian Army troops in 1911. These small sepoy detachments stayed in Bahrain and Muscat until the both states established professional armed forces of their own.

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<sup>90</sup> Lord Lansdowne, Persian Gulf Declaration, 5 May 1903; *The Times*, 6 May 1903, p. 8. Cited in Onley (2009), p. 11. This declaration was repeated in substance by Sir Edward Grey in 1907.

<sup>91</sup> L. Fraser, 'Gun-running in the Persian Gulf,' *Proceedings of the Central Asian Society*, 17 May 1911; Hon. Arnold Keppel, *Gun-running and the Indian North-West Frontier* (London: John Murray, 1911); and Brigadier-General H. H. Austin, *Gun-running in the Gulf and other stories* (London: John Murray, 1926). General Austin (then a Major serving in India) was sent 1909-1910 on special duty to the Persian Gulf for the prevention of gunrunning. Two additional gunboats from the East Indies Station (HMS Sphinx, a composite paddle vessel, and HMS Lapwing, a Redbreast-class gunboat, were sent in March 1909. See: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 March 1909.

<sup>92</sup> The National Archives, Kew, UK (hereafter abbreviated as TNA) ADM 116/1250, Report by Captain (HMS Hyacinth) to The Commander-in-Chief HM Ships and Vessels, East Indies, 'Dubai – 24 December 1910; and Lt. Col. Percy Z. Cox (Political Resident in the Persian Gulf) 'Administrative Report for the Trucial Coast for the Year 1910,' Chapter IX of: *Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency for the year 1910* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1911), pp. 8-9. See also Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967), p. 289. Busch, however, gets some of the dates wrong.

<sup>93</sup> The firefight resulted in the death of at least five of the landing party. British action killed approximately thirty-seven locals and wounded dozens more. On the role of Shaikh Butti see Graeme Wilson, *Rashid's Legacy: The Genesis of the Maktoum Family and the History of Dubai* (Dubai: Media Prima, 2006), pp. 38-39.

## 2.3 Exercising Shaikhly Authority before Professional Forces

Before the formation of organised and centrally controlled security forces, the leading shaikhs of Eastern Arabia employed a variety of methods to defeat or deter rival claimants; to defend key settlements and vital wells against aggressors; and to embark on expeditions against neighbours. Several anthropological studies conducted in the twentieth century shed light on the practices of shaikhly rule on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>94</sup>

The role of tribal shaikhs in Eastern Arabia emerged by group consensus and was always dependent upon tribal approval. A tribal shaikh was more like a chairman of a committee and was never more than *primus inter pares* (first among equals).<sup>95</sup> He exercised his leadership through personal authority rather than direct power: he was a leader, not a ruler.<sup>96</sup> By contrast, a ruling shaikh employed a small group of armed retainers who could impose his will as a last resort.<sup>97</sup> This entourage, or *Rajail al-Shaikh* (men of the head chief), formed a private protective bodyguard for the ruler, collected taxes (or tribute) and made arrests in the ruler's name.<sup>98</sup> Because ruling shaikhs could never be certain about their relatives' allegiance, bodyguards were most commonly made up of tribesmen from out-of-kin groups, especially slaves or manumitted slaves.<sup>99</sup> This is an old practice in the Arab world. The caliph al-Mahdi

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<sup>94</sup> See for example: Talal Asad, 'The Bedouin as a Military Force: Notes on Some Aspects of Power Relations between Nomads and Sedentaries in Historical Perspective,' in Cynthia Nelson (ed.), *The Desert and the Sown – Nomads in the Wider Society* (Berkeley: Institute for International Studies, 1973); H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949); Louise E. Sweet, 'Camel Raiding of North Arabian Bedouin: A Mechanism of Cultural Adaptation,' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 67 (1965), pp. 1132-50; and Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959), esp. pp. 51-2 and 57-9.

<sup>95</sup> S.B. Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), pp. 420-1; and Andrea B. Rugh, *The Political Culture of Arab Leadership in the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> For a general discussion on the sources of authority in tribal society, see Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 90-94.

<sup>97</sup> William Lancaster and Fidelity Lancaster, *Honour is in Contentment: Life before Oil in Ras al-Khaimah (UAE) and some Neighbouring Regions* (Berlin: William de Gruyter, 2011), p. 318.

<sup>98</sup> For a description of how Mohammad Ibn Rashid in northern Arabia organised, armed and quartered this force, see Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (New and definitive edition in one volume, New York: Random House, n.d.), p. 37.

<sup>99</sup> Dickson, (1949), p. 502.

(775-785), for example, gave preference to a group of *Mawali* (manumitted slaves) over kinsmen because he could depend on their total loyalty.<sup>100</sup> Alois Musil's observations of the northern Najd in the 1920s show that this practice continued over a millennium later:

To secure the state and his own life the head chief, or prince [*amir* in Arabic] is compelled to maintain a strong body of mercenary soldiers – almost always negroes – who, having no relatives among the settlers or nomads, are able to give effect to every order of their lord and to protect him against all enemies, since they know that their own fate is linked with his.<sup>101</sup>

Through this bodyguard rulers could to some extent extend their writ over nearby territory. Writing specifically about Ibn Rashid's system of enforcing his control around the northern Arabian city of Hail in the nineteenth century, but offering a point that could be applied equally to the rulers of Eastern Arabia, Rosenfeld argues that it was

[. . .] *non-kin elements, slaves (in part, manumitted) and mercenaries that served as the initial nucleus and primary military strength used in establishing the superiority of the ruling house and protecting its continuity* [original emphasis]. They were the private force which not only superseded but served, as well, as the immediate threat against the nomadic and settled kinsmen in case of their rebelling.<sup>102</sup>

Whilst it was possible to conquer other tribes with one's kinsmen, the need to protect a shaikh's privileged control of property and trade fell on shoulders of the slaves and mercenaries that formed the loyal armed nucleus of his household.<sup>103</sup> At points in the nineteenth century, the ruling Al Khalifah in Bahrain for example are estimated to have had anything up to 2,000 Africans (slave and free) in their household service,

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<sup>100</sup> David Ayalon, *Islam and the Abode of War: Military Slaves and Islamic Adversaries* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>101</sup> Alois Musil, *Northern Nejd* (American Geographical Society, Oriental Explorations and Studies, no.2: 1928), p. 303.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Rosenfeld, 'The Social Composition of the Military in the Process of State Formation in the Arabian Desert,' Part 2, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jan-Jun 1965), p. 177.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*



many of whom were personal bodyguards. Indeed, public order in the shaikhly capital Riffa was exclusively in their hands.<sup>104</sup>

Maintaining a group of armed retainers did not, however, give leading shaikhs a monopoly over force; rulers had to continue to carefully craft their relationships within their kingroup and other allied tribes. Indeed, the level of support a shaikh was able to maintain from such groups defined the ability to extend his authority over a given territory. Allied tribesmen could be scaled up for rapid conquest or to fight in a unified way when inspired or called to fight for a common cause. Yet support was still subject to the vagaries of tribal politics, including deft marriage strategies. Unable to manipulate tribal alliances to gain an unchallenged position, the Al Thani on the Qatari peninsula instead offered fealty to the Ottomans in late 1871, who subsequently established a military garrison in Doha in early 1872 to provide them with the necessary muscle to dominate those around them.<sup>105</sup> Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans attempted to exert greater sovereignty over its prodigy, which ended in open hostilities between Qatar and the Sublime Porte, culminating in the Battle of Wajba in 1893 between Qatari tribal forces and Ottoman troops, at which the Qataris prevailed.<sup>106</sup>

In order to counter raiding from unsettled tribes, ruling shaikhs built and repaired existing watchtowers.<sup>107</sup> Coastal towns also built rudimentary forts made from mud and coral called a *ghuree*, in which fresh water was kept inside in case raiders invested the position.<sup>108</sup> In some instances, rulers would salary a small number of guards (or *askars*) to permanently man forts and watchtowers. Until the

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<sup>104</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>105</sup> Despite the nominal fealty the Al Thani showed to Istanbul, Britain continued to deal with him as if he were an independent shaikh. Refer to Habibur Rahman, *The Emergence of Qatar: The Turbulent Years* (London: Kegan Paul, 2005), p. 9; and Fredrick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 31.

<sup>106</sup> Zekeriya Kurzun, *The Ottomans in Qatar: A History of Anglo-Ottoman Conflicts in the Persian Gulf* (Istanbul: the ISIS Press, 2002) and Habibur Rahman, *The Emergence of Qatar: The Turbulent Years, 1627-1916* (London: Kegan Paul, 2005).

<sup>107</sup> Julian Walker, *The United Arab Emirates: Internal Boundaries and Boundaries with Oman* (Farnborough, UK: Archive Editions, 1994), Vol. 4 Inter-Emirate Boundaries, p. 465.

<sup>108</sup> For a description and location of *ghurees* in the Persian Gulf in the 1820s, refer to G.B. Brucks, *Memoir Descriptive of the Navigation of the Gulf of Persia*, in R. Hughes Thomas (ed.), *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, No. XXIV* (New York: Olander, 1985).

end of the nineteenth century, Muscat's defence was based on the forts of Mirani and Jalali that overlooked the harbour and a series of watchtowers on the fringe of the town. Rather than pay and equip a standing force, the Sultan paid an allied tribe to provide a quota of its men armed with assorted out-dated muzzle-loading rifles to man these positions. Indeed, the Al Said Sultans had an arrangement that lasted until the 1970s whereby specific tribes (such as the Bani Umar, Bani Kalban, and the Hawasina) were paid to provide *askars* for guard and rudimentary police duties.<sup>109</sup> Bedouin tribes living in the hinterland of coastal settlements were sometimes paid to protect towns at a distance from raiders, thieves, and plunderers.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, coastal shaikhs paid these martial bands either tribute for this service or exempted them from paying tax. Coastal shaikhs also used revenues from taxes levied on pearling vessels to pay for Bedouin guards to watch over the town during the pearling season when most men were out at sea.

Beyond exercising their authority and defending settlements against raiders, the ruling shaikhs of Eastern Arabia could call a general summons to mobilise the wider tribal confederation for an expedition against an enemy. The ability of a ruler to tap into the manpower of his own or allied clans was crucial for mounting expeditions. In the more heavily settled nineteenth century central Arabia, local rulers made greater use of settled townsmen:

When the chief intends making an expedition against another tribe, the people of the villages are first individually summoned, and more or less forced to engage in the enterprise, everyone on his own camel or horse, and with provisions and ammunition of his own for so long a time as the expedition is reckoned to last; and these always constitute the main force of the army.<sup>111</sup>

The levies raised from amongst the settled population were paid and equipped during their absence from the towns and villages. Townsfolk (*Hadhar*) called upon to

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<sup>109</sup> Calvin Allen Jr and W. Lynn Rigsbee, *Oman under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Henry Rosenfeld, 'The Social Composition of the Military in the Process of State Formation in the Arabian Desert,' Part 1, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jan-Jun 1965), p. 78. See also Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York, 1928).

<sup>111</sup> George Augustus Wallin, 'Narrative of a Journey from Cairo to Medina and Mecca, by Suez, Arabia, Tawila, al-Jauf, Jubbe, Hail and Nejd, in 1845,' *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 24 (1854), pp. 178-9.

give military service were given rudimentary weapons; most were armed with matchlocks, sabres or lances.

Bedouin would also form up, but contrary to popular perception, nomadic tribesmen only formed a minor part of the forces at the ruler's disposal and had a reputation for being unreliable. The rulers did little more than demand a quota of men who must appear. Unsurprisingly, then, the ruling shaikhs of Eastern Arabia measured their power and importance by the number of tribesmen prepared to follow their banner when called upon to do so. It was in this way that in Oman the Portuguese were expelled in 1650 and the Persians in the 1740s. In the event of a major emergency, settlers, tradesmen, artisans and divers (i.e. all those had a stake in the survival of the town) would also join in a settlement's defence. In 1920, for example, almost the entire population of Kuwait town was mobilised after the *Ikhwan* (religious fighters from Najd) threatened to overrun the settlement.

As many ruling shaikhs in Eastern Arabia were based in the main coastal towns, it is unsurprising that traditional practices of raiding were transposed on to the sea. Maritime powers, such as the Al Khalifah in Bahrain, the Al Said in Muscat and the Qawasim shaikhs, could press into service hundreds of *dhow*s.<sup>112</sup> Used for carrying cargo or pearl diving, these versatile vessels could also double-up as fighting ships.<sup>113</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, there were perhaps as many as 1,200 *dhow*s along the Trucial coast dedicated to pearl diving alone.<sup>114</sup> In this way, rulers could translate commercial prowess into military strength.<sup>115</sup> These fleets were primarily used for transporting a landing force, but

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<sup>112</sup> For this estimated number, see Kelly (1968), p. 30.

<sup>113</sup> Kelly (1968), p. 29. The Al Khalifahs commercial success at Zubarah gave them the initial means to contemplate a maritime attack on Bahrain. On the dual use of dhows, see Dionisius A. Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf and Oman: The People of the Dhow* (London: Kegan Paul, 2005), esp. pp. 13-19. In the 1820s, about 2,500 vessels from Bahrain visited the pearling banks annually in the summer. Of course not all these dhows were suitable for military use, but it does indicate the growing maritime prowess of Bahrain.

<sup>114</sup> See also, Frauke Heard-Bey, 'The Tribal Society of the UAE and its Traditional Economy,' in *The United Arab Emirates: A New Perspective*, p. 106.

<sup>115</sup> Oman was able to dominate trade in the Persian Gulf in the latter half of the eighteenth century because of a revival in their maritime strength. According to Robert G. Landen, in the 1790s an estimated five-eighths of the total long-distance commerce of the Persian Gulf passed through Muscat. See Landen's comments in: 'History of Eastern Arabia, 1750-1800: The Rise and Development of Bahrain and Kuwait by Ahmed Mustafa Abu Hakima (Book Review),' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (1970), pp. 273-4. Situated roughly half-way between the Straits of Hormuz and the Shatt al-Arab, Bahrain captured much of the trade in the Gulf. Bahrain's fortunes were improved at Basrah's

when two fleets met at seas the fighting was often hand to hand and brutal. Warfare at sea often took the form of one vessel moving alongside an enemy vessel, and embarking fighters to commandeer it.<sup>116</sup> Apart from a small band of armed retainers, the leading shaikhs did not exercise political control over their territories through establishing centralised repressive institutions. In the 1920s, Britain attempted to change this situation.

## 2.4 The Tradition of Alliance Formation in Eastern Arabia

Small states can only do so much on their own to ensure security. With small territories and populations, the local rulers were required to seek outside help to defend themselves militarily.<sup>117</sup> One might expect that the rulers entering into such bargains harboured the same fears as the King of Siam from the Rogers and Hammerstein musical, who asseverated in song: 'If allies are strong with power to protect me, might they not protect me out of all I own?'<sup>118</sup> Abuses were avoided through a well-established custom of protection-seeking behaviour in Arabia. 'The norms and obligations of the protector-protégé relationship,' James Onley argues, 'provided the rulers with an effective survival strategy in the face of Arabia's ever-shifting power dynamics.'<sup>119</sup> At various points before the period of British hegemony, minor rulers in Eastern Arabia had little choice but to seek the protection of myriad regional powers (the Ottomans, Persians, Saudis, Omanis and the Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah). 'All the ruling families of the Gulf today,' Onley writes, 'have been protégés of regional and extra-regional powers in the past, including the

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expense. A great portion of the Residents of Basrah died from bubonic plague in 1773. Moreover, the port city was occupied by a Persian army after a long siege that lasted from 1776 until 1779. Basrah never really recovered its pre-eminence as a centre of trade after these calamities.

<sup>116</sup> In one notorious naval engagement in 1826, Rahmah bin Jabir, a local shaikh set fire to his own powder magazine whilst alongside an opponent's ship. When it exploded both vessels were destroyed. Lorimer (1915), p. 952.

<sup>117</sup> See Robert O. Keohane, 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics,' *International Organization*, Vol. 23 (Winter 1969), pp. 291-310; and Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

<sup>118</sup> Lyrics to 'A Puzzlement' from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I* (first performed in 1951).

<sup>119</sup> Onley (2009), p. 2.

Saudis and Omanis.<sup>120</sup> It was not then a detour from past practices that throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth century, nearly all rulers actively sought British protection in exchange for certain concessions, and that they were ready to codify these arrangements in legally binding treaties.

The security strategies of many of the coastal rulers were to maximise their independence from both their external alliances whilst at the same time using these alliances to reduce their dependence on internal groups. It will be shown below that the British connection created a new distribution of power in the Gulf states and that their rulers were able to cement their enhanced position through the formation of state tools of coercion. In this way, the ruling families gained in power relative to other groups as a result of the British imperial connection.<sup>121</sup> One of the key ways that this was achieved was through advantages gained from the British connection in establishing their own military forces. Britain could provide the local rulers seeking to build up their own professional forces with weapons, trained men from India, loaned British officers to run and administer the force, uniforms, and, in some circumstances, financial subsidies to get the organisation started in the first place. Indeed, one of the main arguments presented here is that the establishment of professional security institutions consolidated state power in the hands of the ruling families. It provided these burgeoning states with the necessary muscle to suppress challenges to their position. This dovetails with the thinking of leading anthropologist Henry Rosenfeld, whose observation nearly fifty years ago that no state 'appears without the appearance of a state military alongside it' is germane for the Gulf states in the twentieth century.<sup>122</sup> Muscat and Bahrain were the first of the Gulf states in Britain's orbit to establish professional forces in the 1920s, soon followed by Kuwait. The next chapter seeks to uncover what drove these developments and how these forces fitted into British security policy at a time when the area formed the western edge of the Government of India's sphere of influence.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. This argument is also posited by Geir Lundestad in 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952,' *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23 (1986), pp. 263-77.

<sup>121</sup> The wider argument that imperial relationships redistribute power is posited by Joel Migdal in *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1988).

<sup>122</sup> Rosenfeld (1965a), p. 75.

## CHAPTER THREE: LOCAL FORCES AND BRITISH INDIA

### 3.1 Formation of the Levy Corps in Muscat and Bahrain, 1921-6

Before the close of the twentieth century, the system employed by the Al Said rulers of Muscat of mobilising loyal tribesmen in time of need was showing its limitations as a suitable counterweight to the tightening confederacy of tribes in the Omani interior who were becoming more opposed to Muscat's rule. After the near loss of the capital in 1895 to these opponents, the Sultan, Taimur bin Faisal (r. 1913-1932), decided to add 12-pounder guns to his arsenal and recruit more Baluchis from his Gwador enclave on the Makran coast (present-day southwest Pakistan) as palace guards.<sup>123</sup> Despite the Sultan's efforts in 1907 to turn his Baluchi guards into a more credible military force, they remained an un-uniformed static force, garrisoning the forts and watchtowers around Muscat. At the same time, the Sultan's adversaries in the interior were again organizing in 1913 to move against him. Enthused by a renaissance in Ibadism,<sup>124</sup> fuelled by a resentment of the influence Britain and Indian merchants had in Muscat, and angered at their own economic decline tribal forces loyal to the Imam took control of key towns in the interior and appeared to be on the cusp of sweeping away the Sultan.<sup>125</sup> On 27 April 1914, Sultan Taimur attempted again to develop his own military force, issuing a general notice in the villages along the Batinah coast calling for recruits for a force of infantry and artillery.<sup>126</sup> The scheme amounted to very little; recruits were simply absorbed into the palace guard without training. British Indian officials concluded that to save the Sultan they would have to send more troops to support the Sultan's force of loyal tribal fighters, his guard of *askars* and the

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<sup>123</sup> Muscat, the seat of the Sultan's government, is used to describe both the town and nearby Mutrah.

<sup>124</sup> The Ibadi are a Kharajite branch of Islam that rejects the notion that the Caliphate should be vested in any one descent group. The Ibadi are often called the people of consultation (*ahl al-Shura*) because they select the most qualified member of their community as imam without regard to descent or tribal considerations.

<sup>125</sup> J. E. Peterson, 'The Revival of the Ibadi Imamate and the Threat to Muscat, 1913-1920,' *Arabian Studies*, Vol.3 (1976), pp. 165-188. See also Dale E. Eickelman, *Theocracy to Monarchy: Authority and Legitimacy in Inner Oman, 1935-1957*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1985), pp. 3-24.

<sup>126</sup> Ian Buttenshaw, 'Oman's Military Heritage,' *Journal of the Sultan's Armed Forces Association*, No. 61, (March 2012), p. 82.

small detachment of sepoy which had been detached from Bushire to protect the Political Agent since 1911.<sup>127</sup> Back in July 1913, the Government of India had sent a small force of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rajputs based in Bushire to plug the gap before reinforcements from the Indian mainland arrived.<sup>128</sup>

When the attack finally materialised on 11 January 1915, the Indian Army forces, numbering almost a thousand men, formed a screen on the outskirts of Muscat to face approximately 3,000 advancing tribal fighters. The Sultan's own tribal levies, deployed in piquet positions on ridge above Ruwi plain, were the first to come into contact with opposition forces. British Indian Army forces counter-attacked, pushing the rebels back from the ridge. Outgunned, the attackers sustained heavy casualties and withdrew back into the Omani interior.<sup>129</sup>

The successful application of force in Oman did not encourage British Indian officials to consider the option of permanently garrisoning troops in the area to protect the Sultan. The record shows that whilst the Government of India did not want to keep the sepoy in the Sultanate, it accepted that the presence of troops was nonetheless necessary for as long as (a) the threat from the interior persisted, and (b) the Sultan was without the independent means to hold his position.<sup>130</sup> One way of squaring this circle was for the Sultan to stand up his own military. The Government of India provided more than encouragement for this proposal: in 1918 the Sultan was furnished with a loan of six and a half lakhs of rupees (Rs.650,000) under the explicit condition that he must establish a professional force of levies to end his reliance on the Indian Army detachment.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, even though the Arms Traffic Convention was still in force for the Gulf, Britain offered to provide the Sultan with rifles,

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<sup>127</sup> Judging the Persian authorities to be incapable of protecting the lives and property of its subjects, the Government of India decided to station an Indian Army battalion in Bushire (location of the Residency) and began rotating detachments of this formation through Manama and Muscat in 1911. The Indian Army battalion was under the supervision of Commander, Gulf Ports.

<sup>128</sup> During late 1914, troops of the 102<sup>nd</sup> King Edward's Own Grenadiers and the 95<sup>th</sup> Russell's Infantry sailed from India. Peterson (1976), pp. 165-188. For more information, see *Ibid*, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

<sup>129</sup> The Indian Army, in contrast, suffered only seven killed and 14 wounded.

<sup>130</sup> James Onley (2009), p. 10.

<sup>131</sup> Due to improved administrative arrangements, the Sultan's balance in 1921 was six lakhs of rupees. The projected annual cost of such a force was two lakhs of rupees. IOR R/15/1/427, Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 7 September 1920,

revolvers and two ten-pounder mountain guns.<sup>132</sup> The formation of a coercive instrument for the Muscat state was but one part of a wider restructuring of the government that British India officials induced the Sultan to undertake.<sup>133</sup> The British Government of India left Sultan Taimur with very little choice but to establish a professional force and took complete control in shaping what this force would look like.

The defeat of the Sultan's opponents led to the signing of the Treaty of Sib in 1920, establishing a *modus vivendi* between the Sultan and the Imamate that would last until 1955. Whilst this removed the immediate threat to Muscat, British representatives still held the Sultan to setting up a military – a condition of the 1918 loan. The Government of India arranged for the soon-to-be disbanded British-controlled Seistan Levy Corps in Persia to relocate to Muscat and form the nucleus of his new force. Although the financial cost of importing these men would be high, the Political Agent in Muscat, Ronald Wingate, told the Political Resident in July 1920 that the Sultan could and must afford the Seistani levymen. 'To get this levy corps going will be the greatest stroke of policy we have ever done in Muscat,' Wingate wrote.<sup>134</sup> British representatives in Muscat and the Gulf continued to push the Sultan hard to set up a force of their design.

The British took control of forming the Sultan's military, predicating their preference for bringing in outsiders – the Seistanis from Baluchistan – on the grounds that locals were unreliable. Wingate made his opinion on the matter crystalline: 'what is wanted is a small highly paid and well-trained and loyal body of cut-throat mercenaries with no ties in the country in which they serve and no love for the Arab. It is no use blinking this fact.'<sup>135</sup> This tactic was not unique to the British; there were Arab precedents stretching a long way back. The Abbasid dynasty in the ninth century, for example, recruited newly converted Turkish tribesmen because successive rulers felt they could not rely on the

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<sup>132</sup> For lack of funds, the Sultan did not purchase the mountain guns.

<sup>133</sup> J.E. Peterson (1978), pp. 90-92. See also: H. al-Musawi, A History of Omani-British relations with special reference to the period 1888-1920 (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1990).

<sup>134</sup> IOR L/P&S/10/928, Wingate (Political Agent & HM Consul, Muscat) to Political Resident, 22 July 1920.

<sup>135</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/2956, Wingate to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 30 April 1920.



loyalty of their fellow Arabs. Indeed, the Al Said Sultans themselves had recruited palace guards from Gwador for the same reason.

Despite the financial burden involved, Sultan Taimur agreed to import the soon to be disbanded Seistani Levy Corps and, on 15 February 1921, 250 soldiers and their British Indian Army commander, Captain E.D. McCarthy, began their two-month long journey to Muscat.<sup>136</sup> The Muscat Levy Corps, as the force was renamed, camped outside of Muscat until the Indian Army sepoy vacated the fort at Bait al-Falaj on the outskirts of the capital in June 1921.

Although most of the cost of the force came out of the Sultan's purse (albeit through a Government of India loan), the British continued to shape the force after it arrived in Muscat and structured it along British Indian Army lines. The malaria season, however, tempered the strong British preference for foreigners over local recruits. Indeed, so many Seistanis fell ill in the years immediately after the force arrived in the Gulf that almost half their numbers were on the daily sick list.<sup>137</sup> Their intolerance to the climate, combined with the cost involved in sending each levyman home on leave, led to a reverse in course; British officials were now persuading the Sultan to replace the Seistanis with locals. By October 1921, locally recruited men formed two sections and there was a waiting list of over fifty others wanting to join. Between September 1921 and March 1922, Levy Corps discharged 164 Seistanis, and in May the last party of 58 left.<sup>138</sup> It was not, however, local Arabs who replaced the

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<sup>136</sup> They undertook a seven-day march to the railhead from where they travelled to Karachi to await a boat to Muscat. An outbreak of measles and the inability to obtain transport meant that they remained in the Indian port city until mid-April. On 19 April 1921, after two months' travelling, they arrived in Muscat. The MLC's establishment on arrival was one British officer, six Indian officers and other ranks instructors, three Baluch Jemadars, 12 Daffadars, 12 Naiks, and 217 Sepoys. The force was organised in to three troops of 80 men.

<sup>137</sup> IOR L/P&S/10/928, Wingate (Political Agent, Muscat) to Lt. Col. Arthur Prescott Trevor (Political Resident), 11 September 1921. In fact, the MLC discharged 17 Sistanis in the immediate months after they arrived in April 1921 due to malaria. The presence of a medical officer in Mutrah and the complete overhauling of the drainage system at the end of 1924 reduced levels of malaria. Before, in January and February 1922 (the worst months for malaria) sufficient men could not be found for guard duties. In the same months in 1926 the average daily sick report for the fever numbered only four men. Malaria: Feb 1926 (46 admissions), Feb 1927 (six admissions), Feb 1928 (11 admissions).

<sup>138</sup> IOR L/P&S/10/928, Report by Commandant MLC (Captain McCarthy) to Political Agent (Wingate) on progress (for the period 18 February to 31 August), 8 September 1921. The strength of the Levies on 20 March 1922 stood at 58 Seistanis and 193 others, the majority of whom were either local or Gwador Baluchis.

Seistanis. Although small numbers of local Arabs and African manumitted slaves from the Sultan's entourage did join the force, the majority of new recruits were either Omanis of Baluchi origin (some of whom had already served the Sultan as *askars*) or Baluchis recruited from the Sultan's Gwadar enclave on the Makran coast.<sup>139</sup> They were, however, all the Sultan's subjects, and British representatives felt a great success had been achieved. British officials were especially keen to get members of leading families into the Levy Corps in order to tie it more closely to Muscat regime and to initiate the local elite in modern practices. The Sultan's brother, Syed Salim bin Faisal, whom the Political Resident, Lt. Col. A.P. Trevor, had last seen as 'a slacking, idle and good for nothing youth,' joined the force, after which he became in Trevor's eyes 'a smart and well set up young officer.'<sup>140</sup> Wingate admitted that he did not believe at the time that the transformation from the 'undisciplined and idle mob who formed the Sultan's old so-called army' into the present force could have been possible.<sup>141</sup> Resident Trevor believed that continued British leadership of the Muscat Levy Corps was the critical factor. Trevor thought Captain McCarthy, had made 'good headway in training this very unpromising material' and wanted him to stay beyond his original six-month engagement to carry on this 'experiment' in training local Arabs.<sup>142</sup>

If he [Captain McCarthy] succeeds in turning the local Arab into a good soldier, it will save the state [Muscat] from having to rely on foreigners for the force, from the risk of the force being rendered inefficient by the foreigners not being able to stand the abominable climate of Muscat, and last but not least from incurring extra expenditure in pay and allowances and leave passages. In addition he will have achieved a feat which has hitherto been believed impossible by all those competent to form an opinion.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> IOR R/15/1/428, Captain McCarthy (Bait al-Falaj) to Wingate with a final Report on the progress of the MLC, 20 February 1923.

<sup>140</sup> Later, the British commander Captain Alban pushed for, and achieved, Syed's resignation; but the Sultan reinstated him in 1924 and soon after he was promoted. He retired at his own request in October 1925. IOR L/P&S/10/928, Wingate to Lt. Col. Trevor, 11 September 1921.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Britain's representatives in the Gulf were delighted with Captain McCarthy, who stayed in command until March 1923. Ibid, 'Report on the working of the Muscat Levy Corps,' Lt. Col. Trevor to Denys Bray (Foreign Secretary to the Government of India in Delhi), 22 October 1921.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

The Muscat Levy Corps could only make a limited contribution to British security policy. Whilst British officials calculated that the Sultan had his own means to defend his capital without British military assistance, they also understood that the Levies had little utility outside Muscat.<sup>144</sup> Although the force escorted the Sultan on a tour of the Batinah Coast in the spring of 1922, its commander, McCarthy, still felt that the Levy Corps could not stand up against a large group of tribal opponents in the field. He lobbied the Government of India to re-arm the force with modern rifles. '[A]s the force here is comparatively a small one, and as we are likely to engage at some time or other with considerable numbers [of opposing tribal fighters] the success of the Levies will depend on the volume of fire'.<sup>145</sup> In response, the Government of India offered in September 1922 to supply modern rifles at reduced rates. The Sultan, however, claimed he did not have the funds to purchase these weapons even at a knocked-down price.<sup>146</sup> This provides further evidence that the British placed more importance in this fledgling force than the Sultan.

The limitations of the Levy Corps were on full display later that year. After the Al Saad tribe burnt down a customs post on the Batinah coast, the Sultan demanded reparations and their acceptance of his right to tax imports. Until the twentieth century, the Sultans of Muscat were essentially merchant princes, whose commercial interests were largely exogenous to Oman; they had been the principle maritime power in the region for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century with domains in Zanzibar and much of the East African coast.<sup>147</sup> With British support, Sultan Taimur wanted to extend the writ of the Muscat state over greater territory, starting with the coastal towns to the northwest and southeast of the capital.

Too weak to tackle the Al Saad tribe alone – it was estimated that they could assemble 500 armed fighters – Sultan Taimur asked Britain to assist. As

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<sup>144</sup> IOR R/15/1/428, Wingate to Lt. Col. Trevor (forwarding final report by Captain McCarthy on MLC), 14 March 1923. Lt. Col. H. H. Smith, Commanding Gulf Ports, made similar observations after he visited Muscat. .

<sup>145</sup> IOR R/15/1/148 Report by Commandant MLC (Captain McCarthy) to Major M. E. Rae (Political Agent, Muscat) on progress (for the period 1 September 1921 to 20 March 1922), 20 March 1922.

<sup>146</sup> This price included shipping costs and the supply of ancillaries for the rifles. TNA FO 371/8955, Denys Bray to Lt. Col. Trevor, 11 September 1922; and *Ibid*, 'Re-armament of the Muscat Levy Corps,' Lt Col. Trevor to Denys Bray, 9 March 1923.

<sup>147</sup> John Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in Southeast Arabia* (Oxford, 1977), p. 138.

the British wanted to capture two notorious slave traders whom the Al Saad harboured they agreed. In October 1922, a ship from the Gulf Squadron (HMS *Cyclamen*) towed lighters carrying a hundred men of the Levy Corps and 30 irregulars up the coast from Muscat.<sup>148</sup> Unimpressed by this joint force, the Al Saad refused to submit to British-Muscati demands. Even after suffering a naval bombardment,<sup>149</sup> the burning of beached dhows and the confiscation of other vessels the Al Saad tribal leaders did not yield.<sup>150</sup> It eventually took the combined guns of three British sloops to bring them to heel.<sup>151</sup> This affair shows that the Sultan's writ outside Muscat still required British naval guns; the Levy Corps could not operate independent of British support outside the capital. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Muscat Levy Corps did meet Britain's aims: by creating a centralised and professional British-officered force, the Sultan was more secure in Muscat and less likely to need to call on the Government of India to send sepoy for his defence. Furthermore, it allowed the British in 1925 to remove the detachment of sepoy that had guarded the Political Agent in Muscat since 1911. In a further demonstration of British support to the Levy force, the Political Resident recommended an increase of fifty men to cover guarding duties at the Political Agency. The Government of India agreed to pay the salary of the force's British commander to off-set the costs associated with expanding the unit.<sup>152</sup>

It was not only the existence of the Muscat Levy Corps that led to a reassessment of the concept of stationing sepoy detachments in Muscat. The Deputy Secretary of the Government of India's Foreign and Political Department, Mr Parsons, argued to the Political Resident in October 1925:

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<sup>148</sup> As well as official representatives from Muscat, the ship carried the Political Agent, Major Rae, and the SNOFG, V. Bradon.

<sup>149</sup> TNA FO 371/9036, V. Bradon (SNOFG) to C-in-C East Indies Station, 'Proceedings (No. 26) in Connection with Batinah Coast,' 1 November 1922.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, Commander of HMS *Espiegle*, George Holbrow Lang to V. Bradon, 'HMS Espeigle,' 14 November 1922.

<sup>151</sup> The threatened targets were the villages of Raddah and Bataha and the towers of Sur Mughabasha and Sur Yal Hilal. Heavy bombardment was sanctioned by the Political Resident, allowing for unrestricted destruction of property other than mosques where these were distinguished. Ibid, Major Rae to V. Brandon, 19 November 1922; Ibid, V. Brandon (on board HMS *Cyclamen*) Major Rae, 'Bombardment of Yal Saad Villages,' 19 November 1922; and Ibid, V. Brandon to C-in-C East Indies Station, 'Proceedings (No. 29),' 10 December 1922.

<sup>152</sup> IOR R/15/2/118, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux (Political Resident) to Government of India, 31 October 1925

Indeed, there seems even less reason for maintaining our detachments [of sepoy] in the Gulf while His Majesty's gunboats patrol the Gulf and have access to the ports where British consulates and establishments are located. It is on this command of the sea rather than on the maintenance of scattered detachments that our prestige mainly rests.<sup>153</sup>

Added to this, Persia's decision to demand the withdrawal of the Indian Army battalion made the system of rotating detachments through Muscat and Manama untenable.<sup>154</sup> The impending withdrawal of the sepoy from Manama meant that Political Agency would be left unprotected. But this, as it turned out, was not the chief reason why British officials pressed for Al Khalifah in Bahrain to establish a professional force.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Bahrain was the most developed of the protected states and was a key British interest. During the First World War it served as a logistical hub for men and war materiel sent from India for the Mesopotamia campaign. Despite Bahrain's importance, the Government of India wanted to remove the sepoy protecting the Political Agency and its staff in Manama because of the cost and administrative inefficiencies of stationing a small Indian Army guard overseas. There was also the additional fear that the Indian Muslim sepoy were susceptible to the sedition preached to them at Manama's mosques and by fellow Indians in Bahrain who were non-cooperationists.<sup>155</sup> So in 1923, the Government of India began exploring the option of replacing the sepoy with a local force. It would be wrong to say that finding a substitute for sepoy protection on its own drove British policy on this matter. The most important factor in play was the need to tip the internal balance of power in Bahrain in the direction of the Ruler.

Overall, the alliance with the British provided the ruling shaikhs with prestige and revenue, giving them the means to cement their paramount

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, Mr. A.E.B. Parsons (Deputy Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department) to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux (Political Resident), 'Withdrawal of Military Detachments in the Persian Gulf,' 13 October 1925.

<sup>154</sup> The Government of India decided in 1923, largely at Persia's request, to withdraw the Indian Army battalion from the Persian Gulf. This was to happen in two stages; the battalion's strength was reduced to half a battalion by 1925.

<sup>155</sup> IOR R/15/2/118, Under Secretary of State for India to Bahrain Agency, 30 April 1922.

position.<sup>156</sup> Yet the Al Khalifah rulers in Bahrain were often in a weak position vis-à-vis their own families and other prominent Sunni tribes that had migrated to Bahrain since the latter half of the eighteenth century. The ruling family did have some means of maintaining order. In Manama, the leading Al Khalifah shaikhs retained men known as *natur*s (night watchmen) who had the task of keeping peace in the busy market. With the establishment of the Manama *baladiyah* (municipality) in 1919, the *natur* system was superseded by a civil force of police.<sup>157</sup> The *baladiyah*'s police, however, was unable to cope with disorder; this small force could not provide a credible counterweight to the armed tribesmen who were a law unto themselves when in Manama and the unrivalled power in the hinterland. Stopping Sunni tribal raids on Shia villages in Bahrain became an urgent matter for Britain in the early 1920s. Persia, which claimed Bahrain as its own territory, used the attacks on its co-religionists to show that the political status quo – the Al Khalifah ruling family backed by Britain – should be replaced. Irked by the palsied response of then-aging-ruler Shaikh Isa bin Ali (r. 1869-1932) to Sunni tribal attacks and his resistance to reform, Britain pressured him to step aside and let his son, Shaikh Hamad, rule as regent. Once holding the de facto reins of power, Shaikh Hamad did indeed enact a number of reforms, but this put him in a position of opposition to many of Bahrain's most prominent Arab Sunni tribes, especially the powerful Dawasir. Shaikh Hamad was now devoid of the means of internal protection that successive Al Khalifah rulers had relied upon – the support of fellow Sunni tribes. British military support, largely in the shape of the Gulf Squadron, could offer little comfort to Shaikh Hamad when disgruntled tribesmen could achieve a *coup de main* against him with little warning.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> See David Roberts, 'The Consequences of the Exclusive Treaties: A British View,' in Brian Pridham (ed.), *The Arab Gulf and the West* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 1-14. J.E. Peterson, 'Tribes and Politics in Eastern Arabia,' *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1977), pp. 301-303. Which settlement constituted a shaykhdom was in a state of flux. Kalba, for example, was considered a Trucial state for no more than fifteen years (1936 to 1951), while Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah were not counted as Trucial states until 1921 and 1952 respectively. F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994) pp. 20-22.

<sup>157</sup> Fred H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Boulder; Co.: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 42-43. The *natur*s were kept but their role was limited to unarmed patrolling Manama's market place at night.

<sup>158</sup> There was a general fear that the Dawasir tribe (before they were compelled to relocate to al-Hasa, modern-day Saudi-Arabia's eastern region in 1923-24) would

Shaikh Hamad and the Political Resident agreed that the most sagacious policy was to set up a state armed force and to expand the municipal police.<sup>159</sup> A professional armed force would relieve Shaikh Hamad of his dependence on tribal fighters; it would provide much needed support to the municipal police; and, by making a strong impression on the local population (even in the training stage), it would serve to enhance his prestige – no small consideration whilst his father, still nominally the Ruler, was alive.<sup>160</sup> For Britain, a centralised military instrument would nullify the excuse made by successive Al Khalifah rulers that they did not possess the power to halt raids on Shia villages. Additionally, British officials hoped that the establishment of force on the lines of the Muscat Levy Corps might obviate the need for Britain to intervene militarily in support of the Ruler.<sup>161</sup> Focusing on this latter point, the Political Agent, Major Clive Daly, fulminated to the Political Resident in August 1924 that because the Al Khalifah rulers did not have the strength to end disturbances in their own country, they constantly requested British warships.<sup>162</sup> Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux, the Political Resident, agreed. Assisting Bahrain in raising a force of about 150 men might be just the remedy to halt future requests for British intervention on behalf of the Ruler.<sup>163</sup>

With Shaikh Hamad's blessing, the British began organising a Levy Force for Bahrain. Offering similar assistance to Bahrain that it had to Muscat, the Government of India agreed to furnish the new unit with a British Indian Army officer.<sup>164</sup> Captain Parke, the selected officer, was tasked with commanding the Bahrain Levy Corps and simultaneously administrating, though

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make a bid to seize control of all Bahrain from their stronghold of Budaiya in the northwest of the main island. Being notoriously unruly, the Dawasir never fully submitting to the authority of the ruling Al Khalifah shaikhs; and even after their migration to the Eastern Arabian mainland, it was still believed that they could return in force to capture the country.

<sup>159</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to Government of India, 7 February 1926. For a similar narrative on the Resident's recommendations, refer to Mahdi Abdalla al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), p.69.

<sup>160</sup> IOR R/15/2/127, Major C.K. Daly (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux, 31 August 1924.

<sup>161</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Capt. Horner (Manama) to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux, (Bushire), 18 August 1926.

<sup>162</sup> IOR R/15/2/127, Major C.K. Daly to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux, 31 August 1924.

<sup>163</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to Government of India, 7 February 1926.

<sup>164</sup> He was succeeded by Captain Geake.

not commanding, the police. Ex-Indian Army non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were brought in to help Parke train a force whose nucleus was over a hundred Omani-Baluchis recruited in Muscat by the British authorities and sent up en masse to Manama. The decision to recruit outsiders may have been taken to appease the influential Persian merchant community, which would have objected to the recruitment of Bahraini Arabs.<sup>165</sup> Whilst British officials may have listened to the concerns of Manama's Persian traders – with whom the Political Agency had a close relationship – the primary justification for selecting Omani-Baluchis was again the British prejudice that local Arabs were of unsuitable martial stock. In contrast, the majority of the Omani-Baluchis had prior service in the Muscat Levy Corps.<sup>166</sup>

The Political Agent in Muscat, Ronald Wingate, had recommended back in August 1923 that the Muscat Levy Corps should be reduced by 100 men and that these should be transferred to Bahrain to form the nucleus of a new force. However, Captain Alban, commanding the Muscat Levy Corps after McCarthy, had already, due to financial expediency, whittled his own force down to a level he considered barely operational.<sup>167</sup> As he had no men to spare, Captain Alban instead offered to raise and train a further 100 local Baluchis and send them to Bahrain along with an experienced Indian *Subadar* (1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant).<sup>168</sup>

By 1926, the Bahrain Levy Corps was a functioning entity.<sup>169</sup> As in Muscat, the British Indian military system was embossed right across Bahrain's new force. The Indian Army provided hand-me-down uniforms and passed on its rank structure of *subadars* (1<sup>st</sup> lieutenants), *halvidars* (sergeants), *naiks* (corporals), *lance naiks* (lance corporals) and *sepoys* (privates). Levies were drilled in Indian Army practices and the standard argot of the force was an

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<sup>165</sup> Mahdi Abdalla al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 69.

<sup>166</sup> Sir Charles Belgrave provides this observation in his memoirs: *Personal Column* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1960), pp. 33-4.

<sup>167</sup> Captain Alban believed the force could not fulfil its role if its numbers dropped below 216 men.

<sup>168</sup> Captain Alban described his Indian Subadar, Naiz Ali, as 'an excellent man, who was for some years in the South Persia Rifles and had independent commands and is accustomed to being "on his own."' The Political Resident thought this would make a good arrangement. IOR R/15/1/428, 'Muscat Levy Corps.' Lt. Col. Trevor to Foreign Secretary to the Government of India (E. B. Howell), 5 January 1924.

<sup>169</sup> The main contingent was based at Manama Fort with detachments at Rifaa and Sitra.



inefficient mixture of Baluchi, Urdu, and English – never Arabic. Mirroring events in Muscat, on 25 March 1926 the Government of India placed enough confidence in the new force to remove its sepoy detachment. In return for taking over the guard duties at the Political Agency building, British Indian officials sanctioned an increase in the size of the Bahrain Levy Corps.

British confidence in the Bahrain Levy Corps turned out to be misplaced; the project proved troublesome almost from outset. The second British Indian Army commander, Captain Geake, spoke of being exasperated with running the Corps and administrating the police. Tiring of Bahrain and longing to return ‘to his regiment and a mess,’ Geake sailed from Bahrain at the end of June 1926 on annual leave with no intention of returning.<sup>170</sup> Command temporarily passed to the newly arrived British financial adviser, Charles Belgrave, who had two years of experience in the Egyptian Army Camel Corps in Egypt during the First World War. Captain Geake’s departure proved serendipitous – at least for him. On the 3 August 1926, an Omani-Baluchi policeman attempted to murder the head of police, Haji Sulman, with a revolver.<sup>171</sup> The situation deteriorated dramatically the following day. Belgrave’s diary entry paints a vivid picture of the events on the 4 August:

Daly [the Political Agent] had been talking to one of the Indian officers in the Orderly Room when a Baluchi Levyman crept to the open window and shot the Indian [a subadar] in the back, the bullet went through him and nicked off a piece of Daly’s ear. The other Indian officer [a havildar] ran up and he too was shot. Daly tried, bravely, to tackle the man, but was stabbed in half a dozen places with a bayonet. Both the Indian officers died but Daly recovered.<sup>172</sup>

The Levy guards on duty fled upon hearing the shooting. Rumours spread that the Corps had killed all its officers and was in open mutiny. Fearing a looting spree, market traders locked up their stores and joined many of Manama’s residents taking flight on boats to Muharraq Island.<sup>173</sup> The two attacks appeared to Daly as part of a wider plot, and he appealed to the Residency in Bushire for help. On 9 August, HMS *Cyclamen* arrived, landing a party of British sailors

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<sup>170</sup> Arab World Documentation Unit at the University of Exeter (hereafter AWDU), Sir Charles Belgrave Personal Diaries, 10 May 1926.

<sup>171</sup> AWDU, Belgrave Diaries, 3 August 1926.

<sup>172</sup> Belgrave (1960), p. 35 and AWDU, Belgrave Diaries, 4 August 1926.

<sup>173</sup> AWDU, Belgrave Diaries, 4-6 August 1926.

(bluecoats) with a machine gun to protect the Political Agency.<sup>174</sup> This was precisely the kind of military intervention that establishing the Levy Corps was supposed to alleviate.

By the time Captain Bernard Stuart Horner, the Political Resident's Chief Secretary, arrived in Manama to lead an investigation, the culprit was in custody (and later executed) and all of the levymen had been disarmed.<sup>175</sup> As well as the presence of bluecoats, 50 men from Manama's Persian community were organised into a special police under Belgrave's command to patrol the town at night as 'all the bad hats [had] taken the opportunity of being up to mischief.'<sup>176</sup>

As for what should happen next, a flurry of telegrams went back and forth between the Agency in Bahrain and the Residency in Bushire.<sup>177</sup> The Political Resident and Belgrave originally hoped to keep at least half the current Muscati-Baluchis.<sup>178</sup> Horner, in contrast, argued that, as all the levies (including the armed guard) had run away when the shooting started, they must all go or be court-martialled. Daly, recovering from bayonet wounds whilst simultaneously fighting off a fever, agreed with Horner that the whole batch of Muscati-Baluchis in both the police and Levy Corps was rotten to the core, including the Corps' Baluchi Mullah who the British identified as a dangerous agitator.<sup>179</sup> Horner's position hardened at the funeral of the murdered Indian *subadar* and *halvidar*. The few levymen who attended jeered at the grief displayed by the dead men's female relatives.<sup>180</sup> British officials later discovered that many of the men in the force were either ex-criminals or men discharged

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<sup>174</sup> Part of the *Arabis* class of minesweeper sloops built during the First World War, *Cyclamen* was decommissioned in 1932. On the 10 August the Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (SNOPG) arrived on his flagship, HMS *Triad*.

<sup>175</sup> British Library (Mss Eur D1116), Private Papers of Capt Bernard Stuart Horner (1889-1982), portfolio one.

<sup>176</sup> AWDU, Belgrave Diaries, 6 August 1926.

<sup>177</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to Foreign Secretary to the Government of India (Simla), 'Bahrain Levy Corps: Sepoys Running Amok,' 14 August 1926.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> This was after documents were found on his possession. Ibid, Capt. Stuart Horner (Manama) to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux (Bushire), 18 August 1926. Belgrave believed that the Mullah, who hailed from the Russian-Persian frontier, appeared to be 'at the bottom of it, a nasty fanatical looking fellow with green eyes, rather like a bad edition of a religious picture, long hair and beard and robes.' AWDU Belgrave Diaries, 6 August 1926.

<sup>180</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Capt. Stuart Horner (Manama) to Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux (Bushire), 18 August 1926.

from the Muscat Levy Corps and other units for bad conduct. Levymen were, a damning post-incident report concluded, overpaid for the little work they did (they were only required to parade on most days for an hour) and when not on duty they caused incessant trouble in the markets. Neither were the police worth the powder and shot in the Political Agency's eyes. Instead of being quartered in barracks or billeted near a suitable *place d'armes* where they could assemble quickly, they had lived scattered throughout Manama, many residing permanently in the town's brothels. Moreover, as police were either Persians who spoke little Arabic or Muscati-Baluchis who could speak neither Arabic nor Persian, inevitable linguistic difficulties arose in the course of their duties.

Daly and Horner's appeal that Bahrain should rid itself of all the Omani-Baluchis, 'bag and baggage,' won out. At the end of August, all Muscati-Baluchis from the police and Levy Corps were marched, under an armed escort of bluecoats, down to the quayside and boarded onto Muscat-bound ships.<sup>181</sup>

Despite the disastrous attempt to set up a Levy Corps and police, the British pressed on with a security force for Bahrain, and Shaikh Hamad continued to defer to the British on how this should be done. Working on the premise that the Muscati-Baluchis would not form part of any future force, Horner proposed that Bahrain could: (a) replace the Levy Corps wholesale with a unit from the Indian Army, (b) recruit Muslims from other parts of India for a new reconstituted force, or (c) build a new coercive instrument made up of Bahrainis.<sup>182</sup> Horner ruled out option (c) as it would, he warned, inevitably mean employing Najdis (Bahraini tribesmen hailing from the Arabian mainland) 'over whom there would be no hold and all security would then cease in Bahrain.'<sup>183</sup> As permanently garrisoning an Indian Army unit was financially prohibitive (for both Bahrain and the Government of India), the only feasible option in Daly's mind was (b), i.e. to recruit more men from India. The Political Agent backed

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<sup>181</sup> Two weeks later Daly left also. Shaikh Hamad supposedly wept copiously. Major Daly had served as Political Agent for five years and laid much of the foundations of the Bahraini state. But he was 'too much the King of Bahrain,' Belgrave wrote, to the extent that '[i]n the Gulf he was known as the Shaikh and the Shaikh Hamad as his shadow.' AWDU Belgrave Diaries, 13 September 1926.

<sup>182</sup> There were 40 Muscati-Baluchi Levies out of just over 100 men. The second largest group were the 18 Baluchis from central Baluchistan who had formerly served in the Zhob militia.

<sup>183</sup> For the options that the Resident's secretary considered and the Political Agent's opinions, refer to IOR R/15/1/347, Capt. Stuart Horner, at Bahrain, to Resident in Bushire, 12 August 1926.

this idea and recommended scrapping the Levy Corps<sup>184</sup> and police<sup>185</sup> and raising a single force of Punjabis commanded by a British officer.<sup>186</sup> The requirement for a security force to protect the Ruler was underscored in October 1926 when gunmen attempted to kill Shaikh Hamad as he travelled in a motorcar outside of Manama.

Shaikh Hamad sent his financial adviser, Charles Belgrave, to Karachi in October 1926 to initiate the recruitment.<sup>187</sup> In the interim, Bahrain paid the Government of India for the temporary loan of a 100-man Indian Army detachment (two platoons of the 3/16<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment). The final batch of Indian recruits — mainly former soldiers and policemen — arrived early in 1927 to relieve the sepoy, whose presence was criticised by many Bahrainis for the strain they placed on the government's finances.<sup>188</sup>

The Bahrain Levy Corps mutiny had not dissuaded Britain from building up local forces in Bahrain and Muscat. Indeed, British officials were quick to reform an armed police for Bahrain and disassociate the events of 1926 from the Muscat Levy Corps. 'The wholesale condemnation of the [Bahrain Levy] Corps is to be deprecated if possible,' the Political Resident told the Government of India, 'as it will naturally throw doubts on the reliability of the similar force at Muscat, which has been very well reported on.'<sup>189</sup> Establishing a force in Bahrain was more of a collaborative effort with the Ruler than it was in Muscat where British officials had to cajole the Sultan into setting up a professional coercive instrument of state and to take it seriously thereafter. In

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<sup>184</sup> This comprised at the time: one British Commanding Officer (who also served as the Administrative Commandant of the Police); one Indian officer; four Indian Havildars; one Baluch Havildar; two Naiks; eight Lance Naiks; and 132 Sepoys.

<sup>185</sup> The police were made up of one Arab Superintendent (with the Commanding Officer of the Levy Corps serving as the Administrative Commandant), five Wakil Shawish and 83 Nefars. These ranks are from the Ottoman Army. It seems that they found their way to Bahrain via the British-run Sudan Defence Force, which kept the use of Ottoman ranks when it was formed.

<sup>186</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, 'New Police Corps for Bahrain,' 25 September 1926. See also: Mahdi Abdalla al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), pp.76-77.

<sup>187</sup> IOR R/15/1/347, Lt. Col. Prideaux to the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, 'New Police Corps for Bahrain,' 25 September 1926.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, Major C.C.J. Barrett, (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Francis Prideaux, 23 December 1926.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to Foreign Secretary to the Government of India (Simla), 'Bahrain Levy Corps. Sepoys: Running Amok,' 14 August 1926.

Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad understood his weak position relative to rival factions in the ruling family and his lack of support from armed Sunni tribesmen. He was therefore more than receptive to the British initiative to establish a professional force. In both Muscat and Bahrain, the Government of India was attempting to make their allies better equipped to confront internal foes in order to reduce the risk that the situation would demand direct British intervention. A similar calculation was made towards encouraging the Kuwaiti leadership to establish its own military, so that the Al-Sabah could deter and deflect attacks by Kuwait's hostile neighbours.

### **3.2 Britain and the Origins of the Kuwait Military in the 1920s and 30s: The *Ikhwan* and Internal Security**

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Kuwait's domestic security was guaranteed by the dominance of the Bani Khalid tribe, which exercised hegemony in the principal town (also called Kuwait) and the immediate hinterland.<sup>190</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Shaikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (r. 1896-1915), who had come to power after murdering his two brothers, faced threats to his position domestically (from nephews and enemies trying to overthrow him) and from the Ottomans, who were expanding into the area and were encouraged by Mubarak's nephews to occupy Kuwait. British interests in keeping other powers out were heightened after Kuwait was nominated at the terminus of the controversial Berlin-to-Baghdad railway. Britain was concerned by the extension of Ottoman influence into areas it concerned to be safely in its orbit. Thus British and Mubarak's interests coincided and a special treaty of protection was signed in 1899 along with several other ancillary agreements.<sup>191</sup> Each time an agreement was signed, a monetary payment of rupees went with it to Mubarak. Although they were irregular, these payments gave Mubarak the means to maintain an armed guard, thereby protecting him from his own subjects and preventing a bid from power from one of his rivals.<sup>192</sup> Hereafter, a

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<sup>190</sup> Mary Ann Tétreault, 'Autonomy, Necessity, and the Small State: Ruling Kuwait in the Twentieth Century,' *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1991), p. 566.

<sup>191</sup> Alan Rush, *Al-Sabah: History and Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family, 1752-1987* (London: Ithaca Press, 1987), pp. 174-5.

<sup>192</sup> Tétreault, (1991), pp. 573-4.

ruler-dominated system of political rule would dominate Kuwait, undergirded by a salaried armed praetorian guard loyal to the Al-Sabah leading shaikh.

The threat to this existing order came not from within but from without. Kuwait's proximity to British Mandated Iraq shaped Britain's policy towards protecting its Kuwaiti protégé. The predatory ambitions of Najd led the acting Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, Sir Arnold Wilson, to propose in 1919 that Britain should declare a protectorate over Kuwait.<sup>193</sup> Some believed that the RAF in Iraq provided suitable means for defending Kuwait. After all, in the early 1920s air power was seen as a panacea for policing the empire on the cheap.<sup>194</sup> In a scheme proposed by Winston Churchill at the Colonial Office, and on the back of its success in Somaliland in 1920, in 1921 the RAF took over military responsibility from the army for the British Mandate of Mesopotamia (Kingdom of Iraq after 1921).<sup>195</sup> From this cockpit in Iraq, the Air Ministry, subordinate to the Colonial Office, extended its influence into the western shore of the Gulf, an area that was traditionally the preserve of the India Office and the Royal Navy.<sup>196</sup> Wherever their bureaucratic loyalties lay, all British officials – whether in London, Baghdad or New Delhi – remained concerned about the threat to Kuwait from religious fighters from central Arabia.

In October 1920, an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 camel-riding *Ikhwan* loyal to Ibn Saud, the Ruler of Najd and future founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, entered Kuwaiti territory. The Kuwaiti ruler, Salim al-Mubarak Al-Sabah (r. 1917–1921), commanded the defence of his territory from the fort at Jahra, a settlement some 20 miles to the west of Kuwait Town. The *Ikhwan* surrounded the fort and, for a time, defeat seemed inevitable. A counterattack by Kuwaiti reinforcements, however, forced the attackers to withdraw, likely saving Kuwait from being absorbed by Najd. After retreating and regrouping, an *Ikhwan*

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<sup>193</sup> David H. Finnie, *Shifting Lines in the Sand: Kuwait's Elusive Frontier with Iraq* (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 85.

<sup>194</sup> Following the Cairo conference in March 1921, the RAF assumed primary responsibility for imperial policing in Iraq. See in particular: David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: the Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1990); and Malcolm S. Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars* (Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>195</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>196</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 36; and Darby (1973), p. 89. Later in 1928, the RAF also assumed command for the defence of Aden at the base of the Arabian Peninsula, replacing the army and Royal Navy.

delegation sent to speak with Salim warned that, unless he surrendered, another attack would come. As Kuwait's weakened forces would be incapable of repulsing a second attack, Salim was compelled to ask for British assistance. A British show of strength in the shape of RAF aircraft from Iraq and three gunboats from the Gulf Squadron convinced the *Ikhwan* to withdraw.<sup>197</sup>

Relations remained poor between Kuwait and Najd after Salim's death in February 1921. Ibn Saud enacted a blockade in 1921, when Ahmad al-Jabir Al-Sabah (r. 1921–1950), Salim's successor, refused to establish a customs post in Kuwait to collect fees on behalf of Najd. Through the British-led Uqair Conference (held in 1922 to settle the borders between Iraq, Najd and Kuwait), two-thirds of territory claimed by Kuwait was awarded to Najd,<sup>198</sup> but this failed to end Ibn Saud's designs on, or his hostility towards, Kuwait. The Saudi blockade remained in place for a further 15 years.<sup>199</sup> A 'cold war' ensued; that is, both sides were formally at peace but attacked one and other in border areas.<sup>200</sup> Large *Ikhwan* raids continued into Kuwaiti territory (as well as into Transjordan and Iraq) into the late 1920s.<sup>201</sup>

Britain took the *Ikhwan* threat so seriously that it set up a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, chaired by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, to discuss how best to respond. In June 1928, the sub-committee recommended establishing a string of desert posts covering a 500-mile frontier from Transjordan to Kuwait.<sup>202</sup> As part of this defensive scheme, Special Service Officers (SSOs), drawn mainly from RAF intelligence, were appointed to collect intelligence on *Ikhwan* movements and direct the RAF's armoured car

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<sup>197</sup> Anthony B. Toth, 'Tribes and Tribulations: Bedouin Losses in the Saudi and Iraqi struggles over Kuwait's Frontiers, 1921-1943,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32 No. 2 (2005), p. 147.

<sup>198</sup> John C. Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p. 145.

<sup>199</sup> Joseph Kostiner, *Saudi Arabia, 1916–1936: From Chieftancy to Monarchical State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 152–154 and pp. 179–181.

<sup>200</sup> H.R.P. Dickson covers the attacks and responses in some detail in *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), pp. 285–330. John Bagot Glubb, *War in the Desert* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1960), while focusing on the Iraq area of conflict, also deals with attacks on Kuwait.

<sup>201</sup> See Anthony B. Toth's chapter, 'Last Battles of the Bedouin and the Rise of Modern States in Northern Arabia, 1850-1950', in Dawn Chatty, ed., *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>202</sup> TNA CAB 24/196, 'Frontier Posts in the Desert Area of Iraq South of the Euphrates', Note by the Air Staff, 4 June 1928.

convoys and aircraft based in Iraq against them.<sup>203</sup> In 1928 British officials in Baghdad sent the Basra SSO, Captain Gerald de Gaury, to Kuwait for several months to coordinate RAF attacks on the *Ikhwan* directly from there.<sup>204</sup> Even the stationing of an SSO in Kuwait territory in 1928 was a precedent bitterly opposed by India and its representatives. They feared that the Colonial Office and Air Ministry were dragging Kuwait into a wider regional conflict.<sup>205</sup> The High Commissioner in Iraq, however, claimed that not only did the Ruler support RAF activity in Kuwait but that he had personally requested reconnaissance flights over his territory to seek out *Ikhwan* raiders.<sup>206</sup> The Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Iraq wanted to take the RAF role in Kuwait one stage further by setting up temporary air bases in Kuwaiti territory. In clear divergence with their Government of India counterparts, officials in Baghdad believed that the affairs of Kuwait were subservient to wider British strategic interests, which for them meant the security of Iraq.<sup>207</sup> The Political Resident saw matters from a different standpoint. 'If we disgruntle Ibn Saud', he argued to the Colonial Secretary, then the embargo on Kuwait would probably tighten. Moreover, 'it is likely to affect us considerably on every face of Arabia.'<sup>208</sup> These fears were justified. Ibn Saud had already been frustrating British attempts to establish an air route along the Arabian Gulf coast, linking RAF commands in Iraq and Aden. In 1927, he used

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<sup>203</sup> The SSOs familiarised themselves with local tribes by often living with them. John Bagot Glubb, *The War in the Desert: An RAF Frontier Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960). Glubb was one of the first SSOs to be appointed, although he was not from the RAF. He urged the British authorities in Iraq to mobilize loyal Bedouin to fight off the *Ikhwan* threat. His belief in the usefulness of local Arabs as fighters remained throughout his career. He later served in the Iraqi civil administration and the Transjordan armed forces, commanding the Arab Legion from 1939 to 1956. For a general discussion on the use of SSOs in Iraq and Transjordan and a comparison with the French system of Service de Renseignements in Syria, see Martin Thomas, 'Bedouin Tribes and Imperial Intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in the 1920s,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct. 2003), esp. pp. 546-551.

<sup>204</sup> Later, Gerald de Gaury served as Political Agent in Kuwait.

<sup>205</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 38.

<sup>206</sup> TNA CO 732/31/1, High Commissioner for Iraq to Secretary of State for the Colonial Office, 22 December 1927, requests for airplane reconnaissance of Kuwait.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, High Commissioner for Iraq to Secretary of State for the Colonial Office, 15 February 1928. According to the Civil Commissioner in Iraq, Henry Dobbs, the British government attached great importance to the principle that the RAF stationed in Iraq should be made available for wider imperial purposes, i.e. retaliatory strikes against *Ikhwan* targets in Najd. To identify the RAF in Iraq as solely concerned with mandate affairs was a regrettable position to hold, Dobbs wrote to the Colonial Secretary.

<sup>208</sup> TNA CO 732/31/1, Lt. Col. Francis Prideaux to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 February 1928.



his influence among the tribes of the lower Gulf to scupper a British expedition to find suitable landing grounds along the Trucial coast. Sir Denys Bray, Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, claimed that 'Kuwait is suffering from the trouble between Ibn Saud and Iraq, partly because it has become linked up with Iraq, and partly because the [Royal] Air Force use it as part of the air route for getting at Ibn Saud.'<sup>209</sup> After some resistance to the idea, the India Office conceded that it could envisage air operations over Kuwaiti territory, but there could be 'no question of establishing a *permanent* air base in Kuwait territory.'<sup>210</sup>

When authority to undertake flights over Kuwait was granted to the Air Officer Commanding Iraq it came with two stipulations: firstly, reconnaissance flights must be as infrequent and as least provocative as possible; and secondly, the Ruler should be given no grounds for supposing that responsibility for the defence of Kuwait now fell at the feet of the RAF. British officials wanted the Ruler left in no doubt on this point.<sup>211</sup> Indeed British officials in the Gulf, including the Political Resident, believed that Kuwait should be doing more for its own protection.

When in 1929 the High Commissioner for Iraq requested that RAF armoured cars be temporarily (for one month) concentrated in Kuwait in order to protect Iraqi shepherds and tribes from raids launched through Kuwaiti territory, the Colonial Office raised no objections, so long as the Kuwaiti ruler agreed.<sup>212</sup> The Political Resident, Lt Col. C. Barrett, however, believed that it would be far more effective if the Ruler had the capacity to defend his own territory. One contemporary observation estimated that in the late 1920s the Al-Sabah had about 300 *fidawiyya* (loyal armed retainers) at their immediate service and could expect the support of an additional 700 well-armed fighters who were an 'unpaid conglomeration of families with tribal backgrounds'.<sup>213</sup> In a general emergency, the population of Kuwait town could be mobilised to defend the city walls. Yet

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<sup>209</sup> TNA CAB 16/93, Committee for Imperial Defence, (Persian Gulf, Sub-committee, Minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 22 November 1928.

<sup>210</sup> TNA CO 732/31/1, India Office to Colonial Secretary, 22 August, 1928. Original emphasis.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, Colonial Secretary to High Commissioner for Iraq, 25 September 1928.

<sup>212</sup> TNA CO 732/40/4 Colonial Secretary to High Commissioner for Iraq, 23 February 1929.

<sup>213</sup> Toth (2005), p. 149.

this was not a sufficient enough force to obviate the need to ask for British military support when the *Ikhwan* threatened again in 1929. Britain had to deploy RAF armoured cars for Kuwait's protection.<sup>214</sup> After the *Ikhwan* threat subsided, Barrett repeated his position that Britain should help put the Ruler 'in a position to repel minor raids without constant calls on the Royal Air Force for support.'<sup>215</sup> The most effective measure that the Ruler could adopt for the defence of his territory, Barrett contended, was to purchase a fleet of gun-mounted motor cars. The Ruler told Barrett that he was willing to purchase such vehicles and the RAF in Iraq agreed to fit them with machine-guns and train the Kuwaiti crews.<sup>216</sup> With British encouragement, then, Kuwait took its first step towards establishing a permanent force to confront the *Ikhwan* threat in 1929.

Despite setting up a mobile force of armoured cars, Shaikh Ahmad did not jettison old methods. He continued to pay a retainer to a small force of armed tribesmen to remain at all times within a short camel journey of his person. What is more, the plan in the event of a further invasion was for Kuwait to commandeer all light-weight cars and trucks from the town (perhaps 20 vehicles) and to use them to transport tribesmen and armed residents to the area of trouble. It was also thought that Kuwait Town could probably produce 6,000 men and boys armed with a variety of rifles and guns to man the town wall, which if maintained was considered a formidable obstacle to any would-be attacker.<sup>217</sup>

Whilst Kuwait was not the first of the protected states to develop a professional armed force, its military quickly became the largest. In the early 1930s, Kuwait also established a small police force for Kuwait town without British assistance. Once the *Ikhwan* threat subsided, the security forces became an influential new dynamic in the internal power struggles in Kuwait. Before Ahmad al-Jabir assumed the rulership of Kuwait in 1921, he promised the leading merchants of Kuwait that he would rule with the advice of a small

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<sup>214</sup> John Glubb was a SSO assigned to the armoured cars squadrons which were deployed to Kuwait.

<sup>215</sup> TNA CO 732/40/4, Lt. Col. C. Barrett (Political Resident) to Colonial Secretary, 6 July 1929.

<sup>216</sup> A further 10 armoured cars with non-recoiling guns were added to the force in 1933. Dickson (1956), p. 42.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, pp. 42-3; and TNA FO 371/23175, Major R.J. Price (GS02, Air HQ, Iraq), 'Appreciation of the Situation Regarding the Defence of Kuwait against Tribal attacks and Sabotage,' January 1939.

elective council. Once in power, Ahmad did not call a meeting of the council. Economic woes in the 1930s and more vocal claims by Iraq for absorbing Kuwaiti territory led to greater calls from the merchants for participation in decision-making. Ahmad reluctantly accepted the council which soon began passing laws for administrative improvements such as putting the new police force on a more formal footing.<sup>218</sup> The activities and ambitions of the council, which included attempts to gain control over the military, evoked a vigorous response from the Ruler and his supporters. When Ahmad dissolved the council in December 1938, the British supported him. In the negotiations that followed, the rival Salim branch of the family, which had failed to unseat Ahmad, gained control of the police.<sup>219</sup>

The fact that different parts of Kuwait's security forces were controlled by different factions of the Al-Sabah worried the British, who believed that separate power nodes bred instability.

### **3.3 Breaking the Sultan's Parsimony: British Views of the Levy Corps, 1925-37**

The Muscat Levy Corps was a sovereign force of the Sultanate but British India exercised great influence over it. After 1925, the Government of India paid the salary of the force's British Indian Army commander who, in turn, had almost complete autonomy over training and recruitment.<sup>220</sup> In 1925, the British commander began replacing Baluchis from Gwadar – technically subjects of the Sultan – with Baluchis from British India on the grounds that the latter were 'more amenable to discipline, of better physique, and stouter-hearted,' and could over time replace the expensive Indian Army seconded NCOs.<sup>221</sup> The commander outlined his thinking as follows:

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<sup>218</sup> See for example: Muhammad al-Rumaihi, 'Harakat 1938 al-islahiyya fi al-kuwait, al-bahrain wa dubai.' [The Reform Movement in Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai] *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, Vol. 1 (Oct. 1975).

<sup>219</sup> Jill Crystal, 'Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar,' *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21 No. 4 (July 1989), p. 436.

<sup>220</sup> Except for a three month period in 1924 when the British the then-commander, Captain Alban, was invalided, and command passed temporarily to the PResident of the Council of Ministers, the MLC was led by British Indian Army officers.

<sup>221</sup> IOR R/15/1/429, Commander of the MLC to Political Agent, Muscat, 'review of progress of the MLC since July 1924,' 11 May 1926. In 1926, there was a Subadar Major, Fateh Khan, on secondment from the Indian Army's 7<sup>th</sup> Light Cavalry and second in command of the force. Subadar Mir Ahmed Khan, who was a young son

A Staff Havildar-Major from the Indian Army is still necessary to train Levies gunners and superintend recruit training, but I see no reason why within two years all Warrant and N. C. Officers' ranks should not be held by men promoted from the Corps [. . .]. The question of officers is more complicated, and a certain number seconded from the Indian Army [. . .] would appear to be indispensable [for] some years.<sup>222</sup>

Yet Britain did not hold complete sway over the MLC. By controlling the Corps budget (except the salary of its commander), the Sultan could, from time to time, make his judgements prevail. When the Sultan's half-brother, Syed Salim, who had left the MLC in 1925, tried to re-enter the force the following year, the commander failed to resist the Sultan's pressure to reinstate him even though he considered him 'physically and in other ways unfit to be an officer'.<sup>223</sup> Conversely, the Sultan Taimur's lack of interest in the force and his inherent parsimony had a deep impact on the Levy Corps. Once close to 300-men strong, the size of the Corps dropped to 215 men in 1925 and to 190 in 1926. Aside from irregular patrolling work along the Batinah coast and escorting a geological survey team into the interior, the Levies were now little more than a garrison force, guarding key buildings in Muscat.<sup>224</sup> British commanders complained that because the force had taken on the additional guard duties at the Political Agency and the state treasury – as well as preparations to station a detachment in the town of Sur – that it should be expanded and not contracted.

By the late 1920s the Muscat Levy Corps was performing a function very different from what the British Government in India had originally intended. Searching for a new role for the Levies its British commander, Captain R.W.G. Stephens, put the unit to work constructing roads. Almost 40 miles were built between Muscat and Sib across difficult terrain. British officials actually welcomed this use of Muscat's fledgling military as a construction party. The Political Resident remarked that the road from Muscat to Mutrah was so

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from one of the most prominent Makran families. Jemadar Khan seconded from the Indian Army's 20<sup>th</sup> Lancers; Jemadar Mumtaz Ali Khan seconded from 2/6<sup>th</sup> Rajputana Rifles.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. In contrast, the Sultan's first cousin Syed Khalid bin Mohammad bin Turki, who joined on probation in May 1926, was thought to be 'keen and intelligent,' and, it was hoped, who would 'make a fitting representative of the ruling family,' in the force.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

valuable that it 'would alone justify the existence of the Corps.'<sup>225</sup> Whilst Captain Stephens wanted to enlarge the Levies, the Political Resident felt that the force should be reduced until the Sultan's debts were paid off. This austerity was in marked contrast to the period when the Sultan explored forming a pipe band. When Stephens took over command there were 180 levymen. The Sultan's Finance Minister sought to shrink the force to 150, but Stephens argued that if the force dropped to below 165 it would not be able to carry out any tasks beyond guarding buildings in Muscat.<sup>226</sup> Pressure to reduce the size of the Corps came at a time when the Muscat government was trying to press its jurisdiction in other parts of the state.

In Sur, an important dhow harbour for trade (including slaves) between India and Arabia, a local headman of the Bani Bu Ali tribe was acting in defiance of the Sultan, establishing his own customs house and levying taxes on vessels entering the creek (or *chor*). The Sultan feared that the Imam might try and obtain mastery over Sur through proxies, resulting in a further blow to Muscat's finances through lost custom revenues. As early as 1901 the Sultan had erected a series of blockhouses in Sur to enforce tax collection, engaging 100 irregular guards to hold the positions. Their employment, however, was not kept up and the local tribes had become increasingly less willing to obey the Sultan. British officials believed that the Levy Corps was not in a fit state to enforce the Sultan's writ in Sur. The Political Agent, Major G.P Murphy, offering his opinion to the Residency in April 1928, contended that:

The total armed force which the State could muster at present for despatch to Sur would be about 70 men. Such a force would be inadequate to meet a determined attack on the part of tribesmen, and could not look for reinforcement from Muscat. I would be reluctant to advise the State to send it unless Government [of India] were prepared to support it with a Man of War in case of need.<sup>227</sup>

In the hope that the Sultan Taimur could gain better control over the coastal towns outside Muscat, the Government of India helped him purchase a small

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<sup>225</sup> TNA FO 371/13728 Commandant MLC, 'Report on the period 11 May 1926-11 May 1928,' 11 May 1928.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> TNA FO 371/13728, Major G.P. Murphy (Political Agent, Muscat) to Residency (Bushire), 28 April 1928.

patrol steamer (the *Al Said*). Writing to the Residency, Murphy dismissed this attempt at local naval power as pure fantasy:

In actual practice the *Al Said*, although armed with two maxims [machine guns] and a 4" gun, has not imbued its captain and crew with sufficient ardour to enable them to tackle a single dhow, or instilled sufficient awe in the tribes to prevent them firing on her.<sup>228</sup>

If Britain had originally hoped that the Muscat Levy Corps would enable the Sultan to extend his control beyond Muscat, it was clear to the British by the late 1920s that the Levy Corps could do little more than guard buildings and build roads in the town. For Murphy at least, this meant that Muscat's prestige and, in turn, its survival would always rest on 'the support, moral and physical, which they are able to obtain from the British. Without such support the State is impotent.'<sup>229</sup> In full agreement, the Political Resident thought the idea of an independent state of Muscat was 'a fiction'. Muscat is, the Resident continued,

[. . .] an impotent and sterile government, dependent for its existence in every inch of its territory upon the goodwill and support of the British Government. Were it not for this support it would not last for 24 hours but would fall into the hands of bigoted and backward tribes.

Realising himself that he was too weak to deal with his opponents in Sur alone, the Sultan requested 'strong support' from Britain.<sup>230</sup> Because the continued functioning of the Muscat state was important to British interests, the Political Resident accepted that 'we shall thus have to give it the support required and repeat at Sur what we have previously done during the last 50 years.'<sup>231</sup>

A joint task force of British and Muscati forces sailed to Sur in October 1928. The *Al Said*, carrying the MLC and the Council of Ministers, shelled opposition positions. The task force left without resolving the problem. Despite acquiring two 2.75" screw guns from India and forming an artillery section in the late 1920s, British observers considered the forces under the Sultan's control to

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, Major G.P. Murphy (Political Agent, Muscat) to Residency (Bushire), 'Amirs of Beni Bu Ali of al-J'alan and Sur Affairs,' 17 July 1928.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, Translated letter from Sultan Taimur to Major G.P Murphy, 6 July 1928.

<sup>231</sup> TNA FO 371/13728, Lt Col. Lionel Haworth (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary to the Government of India (Dehli), 24 October 1928.

be too weak to confront the Sultan's enemies outside Muscat.<sup>232</sup> Murphy did not believe that the policy to build up local forces in Muscat was misguided; only that it was under-resourced. He wanted the Sultan to expand the MLC to 350 men to confront the Bani Bu Ali tribe in Sur. The money was not available in the Muscat treasury and there was little point in looking to Britain. The Political Resident was confident that 'the Government of India would not be willing to incur the expenditure involved.'<sup>233</sup>

The MLC's limitations would remain into the next decade. In 1930, the proposal for using the Levy Corps in the simple task of escorting a British survey team to the Musandam Peninsula (under Sultanate control) was ruled out on the grounds that, if opposed, they would be outmatched by the local Shihuh inhabitants who had in their possession over a thousand rifles.<sup>234</sup> With the force unable to undertake military expeditions away from Muscat or form detachments in other towns, the British commander, Captain Walker, argued for a more limited scope of duties. He felt that the force should complete its transition into a mainly pioneer unit, building bridges and roads around Muscat. If re-armed with modern rifles, he still felt that it could 'give a good account of itself in times of trouble, would maintain prestige, esprit de corps and self-respect.'<sup>235</sup> Although in March 1931 the Government of India approved to equip the Corps with new rifles, the Muscat treasury again, repeating its position in the early 1920s, refused to allocate funds.<sup>236</sup> The British had been concerned for some time about the lack investment the Sultan was placing in his force. At the end of 1930, the new Political Agent, Major Trenchard C. Fowle, argued to the

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<sup>232</sup> The design was so that the barrel could be separated into two parts via a screw joint. This allowed for the gun to have a heavier barrel, but still be broken into smaller portions for transport by mule teams. This was important for a weapon designed to be used in mountainous and rough terrain, or where adequate vehicle and horse transport was not readily available. The weapon could be carried by 6 mules or towed. Peterson (1986), p. 39.

<sup>233</sup> TNA FO 371/14469, Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary to the GOI, Simla, 'Situation at Sur,' 28 March 1930.

<sup>234</sup> TNA FO 371/14477, Viceroy, Foreign and Political Department to Secretary of State for India, repeating telegram from Resident at Bushire, 8 April 1930.

<sup>235</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/2956, Report on Muscat Levy Corps by Commandant Captain A. R. Walker, 16 November 1930.

<sup>236</sup> In 1931 the Corps was armed with two Maxim guns of doubtful efficiency, one new Lewis gun, 40 modern short rifles and the remainder old, non-charger loading magazine Lee Enfields.

Political Resident that Britain had to take a new line with the Sultan on the question of the Levy Corps. He wrote in November that:

*There must no longer be any question of cutting the Corps down beyond [150 men] because of financial stringency in the state [original emphasis]. . . .The cost of the Levy Corps must be absolutely the first charge on the State Treasury, and no matter what other economics have to be made, no reduction of the Corps will be permitted.*<sup>237</sup>

Sultan Said, whose accession to the throne commenced in February 1932 after being forced to pledge his virtual dependence to the British, spent the first years of his rule establishing as much independence from Britain as possible.<sup>238</sup> He did not initially show any more interest in the MLC than his father. The various Muscat government departments regarded the Corps as a source of motor transport for their general use, whilst the Sultan used the force as a means of obtaining modern rifles for distribution to his slaves and tribal adherents who still made up his personal bodyguard.<sup>239</sup> The Levy Corps did play a supporting role in the second 1932 operation in Sur against the Bani Bu Ali.<sup>240</sup> Captain Alban, commanding the force for a second stint, positioned a hundred men in a screen across the hills leading to a creek from where the Royal Air Force deployed three flying boats (and their stores) for attacks against the Bani Bu Ali strongholds.

By providing successive British commanders, and by controlling supplies of equipment, the Government of India retained influence over the MLC. It was not, however, willing to bankroll the force and did not protest when, as a cost-saving measure, the Sultan allowed a four-month gap between British commanders.<sup>241</sup> The line between British and Sultanate control over the MLC was opaque. When Captain Alban left his post as commander for the last time

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<sup>237</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/2956, T.C. Fowle (Political Agent, Muscat) to Political Resident, 'Policy for Muscat Levy Corps,' 24 November 1930.

<sup>238</sup> Calvin Allen Jr. and W. Lynn Rigsbee, *Oman under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 2-3.

<sup>239</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/2956, Bremner (Political Agent, Muscat) to T.C. Fowle (Political Resident), 'The Muscat Infantry,' 13 February 1935.

<sup>240</sup> The name of the Levy Corps was changed to the Muscat Infantry in 1932. However, the majority of documents from the period continue to refer to the force as the Levy Corps into the late 1930s.

<sup>241</sup> TNA FO 371/15279, Capt. A.R. Walker (MLC Commandant), 'Report on the MLC for the period May 1928-May 1931,' 2 May 1931.



in October 1934, the Sultan asked the Political Agent, Major C.E.U. Bremner, to take charge until Captain Alban's replacement arrived. Thus a representative of the British Government of India commanded (albeit temporarily) the military of what was, in constitutional terms at least, a foreign sovereign state. This stopgap measure gave the Bremner a chance to observe first-hand the difficulties that successive British commanders had highlighted. Almost immediately, Bremner noted that as a fighting unit the Muscat Infantry (as the force was now more frequently referred to) was of little value; that its composition militated against it ever becoming an efficient fighting force; and that the various departments of the Muscat government failed to understand its role.<sup>242</sup> The main problem for Bremner was the makeup of the force. The employment of Baluchis rather than local Arabs had long been encouraged by Britain. 'Without subscribing to the necessity of the Levies being expert cut-throats,' the then Political Agent, Trenchard Fowle, contended back in November 1930, 'I concur they should be composed of elements which have no love for the Arab.'<sup>243</sup> In early 1935, nearly the whole force was Baluchi, but less than a quarter of these were from the Makran Coast, which Bremner thought was a serious drawback. Bremner wrote to Trenchard Fowle, who was now the Political Resident, that 'the Makrani is infinitely superior in every way to the local Baluch. He shows an aptitude for military training, his musketry is good, and whilst his general conduct and discipline is excellent, he is far superior in intellect to the local man.' Because the local Baluch element was mostly townsmen, born and bred in Muscat, they were in Bremner's eyes not part of the 'fighting classes' nor 'true tribesmen,' and thus 'devoid of the inborn instincts of the fighting man.' The consequence of this, Bremner asseverated to the Resident, Trenchard Fowle, was that:

[T]heir training is exceedingly difficult and what the men learn one day, they forget the next. What has often been told me quietly by locally enlisted men themselves would appear to have a certain semblance of truth – i.e. "those that haven't the wit to get a better living elsewhere join the Levy Corps to do a minimum of work and

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<sup>242</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/2956, Bremner to T.C. Fowle, 'The Muscat Infantry,' 13 February 1935.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, T.C. Fowle (Political Agent, Muscat) to Hugh Biscoe (Political Resident), 'Policy for Muscat Levy Corps,' 24 November 1930.

live at home.” Whatever may be the facts, certain it is that the local element is the despair of the Indian Officers of the Corps.<sup>244</sup>

Trenchard Fowle, visiting Muscat, told the Indian officers under Bremner that he ‘wanted to hear no more nonsense about the *Yatim Khanaa* [meaning the Orphanage – what the Indian officers disparagingly called the Muscat Infantry], and that if three Indian officers could not turn 150 men into a fairly respectable force, the fault would not lie with the men but with the officers.’<sup>245</sup> But Fowle appreciated that the Muscat Infantry was no longer in the mind of the Sultan and was underfunded. The solution for Fowle was that the Government of India should encourage the Sultan’s interest in the force.

Owing to his minority, and the absentee rule of his father, the Corps – as well as the other departments of the State – had inevitably to be run by us. The Sultan therefore, not unnaturally, came to look on the Corps as ours – though *he* [original emphasis] paid for it. What we have to do now, as I impressed on Bremner, is to make the Sultan feel that the Corps is his, and get him interested in it.<sup>246</sup>

One method was to conduct training exercises to impress the Sultan. In April 1937, the force carried out a joint exercise with a Gulf Naval Squadron sloop, HMS *Fowey*. The British based the ‘war-gaming’ scenario on a 300-400 strong tribal rebellion intending to attack Muscat. The exercise involved the new commander of the Muscat Infantry, Captain A. Byard, moving his men by sea, landing them at a suitable point and letting them deliver an attack under cover of the warships armaments. The plan to counter the tribal-rebellion scenario was a further illustration that any action by the Muscat Infantry outside the capital would almost certainly require British naval support.<sup>247</sup>

The plan seems to have worked. As an indication that the Sultan now put more value in his force, he placed the Muscat Infantry under the responsibility of his uncle, Sayyid Shihab bin Faisal Al Said, who was also the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He also commanded the small town police, oversaw the Jalali prison, and administered the municipality for Mutrah and Muscat.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, Bremner to T.C. Fowle, ‘The Muscat Infantry,’ 13 February 1935.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, T.C. Fowle to H.A.F. Metcalfe (Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, Simla), 7 June 1936.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> IOR R/15/1/430, Instructions by Commandant of Muscat Infantry, 25 April 1937.

Because most of the officers and men were foreign recruits, the Foreign Ministry was not such a strange home for the Muscat Infantry.<sup>248</sup> When the Sultan began employing British foreign ministers from the late 1940s, the Muscat Infantry came under the purview of Britons privately employed by the Muscat state. Because these men were not answerable to British officialdom, their decisions regarding Muscat's forces – as well as in other policy areas – frustrated Britain's representatives in the Gulf. Britain's experience with Charles Belgrave (Advisor to the rulers of Bahrain since 1926) had been the same.

### **3.4 *Al-Mustashar*, the Residency and the Bahrain State Police in the 1930s**

In the years following Bahrain's formation of the State Police in 1926, British official involvement in the local force waned. At the same time, the influence of Charles Belgrave, a Briton privately employed by the Ruler as his personal Adviser (*Mustashar* in Arabic), was waxing. Bahrain originally employed Belgrave as a financial adviser, but he soon assumed a much larger role in the state affairs, not least in his command of the State Police itself. For a time, the British Indian connection was still important as recruits and trained staff came from the Raj. Responsible for Bahrain's budget, Belgrave cut costs by phasing out the Indians in the State Police and this served to diminish the importance of the connection with the British Government of India in the force. At first Belgrave tried to replace the Indian police with Sudanese, a race with whom he had great experience of from his time in the Egyptian Army Camel Corps during the First World War. Because there was already a large black African community in Bahrain, it was surmised that the Sudanese would better merge with the local population than the Indians.<sup>249</sup> Belgrave was forced to scrap this initiative when he was unable to find sufficient numbers of Sudanese recruits. Instead, he turned to recruiting local Bahrainis. Whilst the Political Resident supported Belgrave's plan for Sudanese, he was against local recruits on the grounds that they would take sides in the event of sectarian trouble.<sup>250</sup> The

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<sup>248</sup> Allen and Rigsbee (2002), p. 6. Because teachers were recruited from Lebanon, the Minister for Foreign Affairs was also responsible for schools and education.

<sup>249</sup> IOR R/15/1/348, Lt. Col. Hugh Biscoe (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary (GOI), 22 January 1932.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

Political Resident, Lt. Col. H.V. Briscoe, on the other hand did not think that the recruitment of local Bahrainis was in itself unique, questioning

[. . .] whether it is correct to say now that the Arab as an armed policeman is an unknown quantity; the police in Iraq are all Arabs and have, I believe, showed themselves to be reliable and efficient, and though the Bahrain Police can hardly be expected to attain quite the same standard, my personal opinion is that they should be able to deal with minor disturbances

At any rate, Briscoe believed that even if a small nucleus of Indians was retained in the State Police it would remain 'necessary to invoke the assistance of His Majesty's ships' in the event of serious trouble and rioting.<sup>251</sup> Briscoe understood that, whatever the risk of letting the Indian policemen go, the dire financial situation in Bahrain necessitated this move.<sup>252</sup> By the beginning of 1932, the State Police had 37 Arabs enrolled and the Indian contingent was cut down to 48. Nonetheless, British Government of India officials still wanted a third of the Bahrain Police to remain Indian as an insurance policy against the untested local recruits – a policy that Britain was employing in Aden.<sup>253</sup> The then Political Agent in Bahrain, Captain C.C. Prior, felt Aden was a poor comparison, and offered his favourable view on the locals that Belgrave was seeking to recruit. He admonished what he saw as the misconception that,

[. . .] the Aden Arab and the Bahrain Arab are one and the same. I believe the Aden police recruit Somalis, one of the most unreliable elements in the Arabic speaking world, whereas the 'Arab' Police at Bahrain are either blacks, who are as trustworthy as Sudanese, and invariably employed by mainland Amirs for the bodyguards, or else Persians whom I have found to be cheerful mercenaries, faithful even when used against their own countrymen.<sup>254</sup>

Belgrave and Britain's representatives in the Gulf agreed that Bahrain was in a financial mess and had to slash the State Police budget by reducing the Indian element. Despite running a monthly deficit, the civil list of payments to Al

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary (GOI), 'Bahrain Police,' 30 March 1932.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, Extract from a despatch from Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary (GOI), 22 January 1932.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, Deputy Secretary (GOI) to Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe (Political Resident), 'Bahrain Police,' 9 March 1932.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, Capt. C.C. Prior (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe (Political Resident), 24 April 1932.

Khalifah family members accounted for 57 per cent of Bahrain's budget. It was less trouble to reduce the police budget than it was to tamper with the civil list. Supplying Indians gave the Government of India influence in the Bahrain State Police, and it was only in light of the great financial difficulties Bahrain was facing that it was 'disposed to allow that [Indian] element to disappear.' The Government of India's Foreign Secretary told the Briscoe that, although the move had his reluctant agreement, he still wanted the following made very clear to Belgrave and Shaikh Hamad:

The organisation of the Bahrain Police force on a purely local basis is however regarded as something in the nature of an experiment to which the Government of India trust that, in view of the risks involved and of the importance of avoiding any incident at Bahrain which could give any foreign power ground for complaint against the administration, you will give your close personal attention and impress the same duty upon the Political Agent.<sup>255</sup>

These comments took Briscoe aback. He pointed out that in general the Government of India had in fact originally been opposed to the employment of Indians in Bahrain's police. Briscoe recounted the comments made by the Government of India's former Foreign Secretary, Sir Denys Bray, in 1927. After conducting a flying visit to the Gulf, Bray had said that he was 'somewhat perturbed' at the level of 'British interference' which he believed was, 'especially over-advertised in the police, a particularly fine body of men, all Punjabi Mohammadans [an archaic term for Muslims], with uniform and drill of an Indian Regiment.' The problem with this in Brays's opinion was that:

They [the Bahrain State Police] suggest at once foreign rule and make it look as if the present state of Bahrain depends on Indian bayonets alone. (A striking contrast is afforded by the appearance of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company Persian policemen in the British settlement at Abadan.) In this, as in all matters, we should cling to essentials and discard the trimmings. We might for instance drop the uniform or at any rate simplify it; replace some of the Punjabis gradually by some element less foreign (e.g. Arabs from the Yemen) keeping a diminishing number of Punjabis as a nucleus.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, Foreign Secretary to GOI to Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe, 20 April 1932.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, Lt. Col. Hugh Briscoe to the officiating Foreign Secretary to GOI (Simla), 28 May 1932. Resident quoting note from Denys Bray to Residency dated 6 November 1927.

Briscoe added that no one was more anxious to see ‘the Arab rulers of the Gulf run their own States on Arab lines than I am . . . but when one has to deal with such a perfectly useless individual as Shaikh Hamad of Bahrain there is nothing to be done but to more or less run the place ourselves.’ Sympathetic to the decisions made by his predecessors at the time of Shaikh Isa’s deposition, Briscoe felt that, as Britain was saddled with Shaikh Hamad, it must ‘make the best of a bad job.’<sup>257</sup> Shaikh Hamad supported Belgrave’s plan for local recruits. Even though he ordered his retainers to nominate their sons and young brothers for the force, he doubted whether enough Bahrainis would volunteer. When recruitment began, however, there was no shortage of men offering themselves for service in the State Police. ‘So many applied,’ Belgrave recalled, ‘that I was able to choose men of fine physique and a certain amount of intelligence; many of them were Negroes, descendants of African slaves,’ but there were also locals originally from Persia, Yemen and other mainland Arab tribes.<sup>258</sup> According to Bahrain’s budget report for 1931/32, the change in policy had an immediate effect on the balance sheet:

The Indian Police are being gradually reduced and the local police are being proportionately increased by which a considerable saving has been made in expenditure on public protection. It is proposed that by degrees the whole of the Indian Force shall be substituted by local men.<sup>259</sup>

In 1932, half of the 120-strong State Police were Punjabis Belgrave had recruited; by 1933, nearly all had finished their service, and only a small number of NCOs stayed on as instructors.<sup>260</sup>

Although Belgrave believed the state security forces were sufficient – Bahrain also maintained over a hundred *Naturs* as an auxiliary force – this did not make Bahrain self-sufficient. For the *Mustashar* based his calculations on the assumption that Britain would always assist Bahrain in the event of external attack. The budget statement for 1931/32, which Belgrave wrote, sets out this position clearly:

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Belgrave (1960), pp. 38-9.

<sup>259</sup> AWDU, Belgrave, ‘Budget for the Year 1350 (1931-32,’ Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1956: Vol. I, 1924-1937.

<sup>260</sup> Belgrave (1960), p. 39.

It was at one time considered quite likely that the Dawasir [an Arab mainland tribe that used to have a branch living in Bahrain, but were expelled after incessant raiding of Shia villages in the early 1920s] might make an armed attack on Bahrain. I am personally of the opinion that there is no likelihood whatever of this occurring. The present force is quite sufficient for the internal needs of the State and as it has always been assumed that, if Bahrain was made the object of attack by a foreign state, the British Government would come to its assistance. I consider it unnecessary for the State to incur heavy expenditure on a more powerful and effective military force than is available at present.<sup>261</sup>

It was just as well Belgrave considered the small size of the State Police sufficient as there was little means of enacting improvements. Bahrain's economy shrank in the early 1930s largely as result of the collapse of the local pearl industry. Ironically, the tensions let loose by this economic downturn gave the new local police recruits their first real test. On 26 May 1932, co-workers of an arrested pearl diver stormed a police station, forcing several of the newly enlisted Bahraini policemen to take refuge on the roof. The Political Agent, Geoffrey Prior, and Belgrave armed a dozen of the last remaining Indian police at Manama fort and headed to the scene.<sup>262</sup> The unrest was only halted when the small police force was augmented by all kinds and conditions of men, including staff of the Political Agency, Belgrave's servants, Shaikh Hamad's attendants and the *Naturs*, 'armed with every kind of weapon.'<sup>263</sup>

Although Prior considered the action by the State Police to be 'a very useful stiffener to the prestige of the Bahrain Government,' the incident shook him.<sup>264</sup> He was appalled by the suddenness with which riots, comprising 'some thousands of ruffians and semi-savages from a dozen different countries', had the potential to occur. In the Political Agent's view, only the discipline displayed by the Indian police had stopped casualties running into the hundreds. Yet

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<sup>261</sup> AWDU, Belgrave, 'Budget for the Year 1350 (1931-32),' The Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-56, Vol. I 1924-37.

<sup>262</sup> They agreed to rush the right flank of the crowd in order to disarm and arrest a few of the ringleaders. Language problems hampered efforts to rush the crowd and disarm the ringleaders; Belgrave knew no Hindustani and could only communicate with a few of the NCOs who knew a little Arabic. The Indians formed up in a line and attacked the mob with instructions not to fire unless ordered to do so.

<sup>263</sup> Belgrave, (1960), pp. 51-2; and TNA CAB 51/1 Lt. Col. T.C. Fowle to GOI (enclosing a report by the Political Agent in Bahrain about the 26 May riot, dated 30 May 1932), 4 June 1932.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

these were precisely the men that Belgrave was phasing out from the force. Once removed, could Britain officials count on the State Police without its experienced Indians to maintain stability in the face of growing societal unrest?

Bahrain's financial situation in the early 1930s precluded any large-scale expansion of the State Police, but enough money was found in the 1934 budget to add a dozen more policemen.<sup>265</sup> The discovery that oil existed in commercially exploitable quantities in Bahrain – first oil was struck in June 1932, with hydrocarbon exports making their mark on the balance sheet by 1935 – provided Shaikh Hamad and *al-Mustashar* with the means to spend more on the security forces. Despite Belgrave's growing number of governmental duties, he still commanded and ran the State Police on a day-to-day basis. In the second half of the 1930s, Belgrave supervised an increase in the number of police stations and outposts. To enhance the Ruler's control over the hinterland and provide protection for the fledgling oil infrastructure, he established a small cavalry unit and camel-mounted section (run by a Sudanese NCO formerly of the Egyptian Army Camel Corps).<sup>266</sup> At the same time, the social and political forces unleashed by the economic growth and rapid development placed greater demands on the State Police. Fuelled by an expansion of the Bahraini economy, the number of schools, cultural clubs, newspapers and radio broadcasts rose exponentially in 1930s. This in turn, increased political awareness, especially amongst the labour force. In November 1938, the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO)<sup>267</sup> was crippled by strikes. Demonstrators took to the streets in Manama in sympathy, forcing

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<sup>265</sup> IOR R/15/1/353 Financial Adviser (Charles Belgrave) to the Government of Bahrain to PA, 'State Budget', 30 June 1935.

<sup>266</sup> This force was also important in order to regulate the flow of arms across Bahrain's borders and to deter an attack by mainland Arabs. Fred H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Boulder; Co: Westview Press, 1989), p. 50; AWDU, 'Annual Report for the year 1353 (1934-35),' The Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-56, Vol. I 1924-37; and Belgrave (1960) p. 39.

<sup>267</sup> BAPCO was a subsidiary of Standard Oil of California, but it was registered in Canada to get around the restrictions obligating the Ruler of Bahrain to engage companies from Britain or the British Empire. For a detailed treatment of the development of the oil industry and its impact on the domestic economy and local society see: Angela Clarke, *Bahrain Oil and Development, 1929-1989* (Boulder, Colorado: International Research Center for Energy and Economic Development, 1990).



shops and businesses to close. The State Police, using its horse cavalry to great effect, dispersed the crowds in the town.<sup>268</sup>

Britain stepped up its assistance to the Bahrain Police at this time, loaning Bahrain several trainers from the Indian Army to teach an influx of recruits an abbreviated training course that included bayonet fighting, musketry, general police duties and *lathi* (a form of fighting with wooden poles used by security forces on the Subcontinent for riot control). Perpetuating this connection, four Bahraini policemen were sent to Karachi to be trained as future instructors for the State Police so that British Indian methods would be cascaded down into the force. Much of British security policy in Bahrain was directed towards helping to improve the capabilities of the local armed police which, by the eve of the Second World War, had grown to three times its original size.<sup>269</sup> With the outbreak of global conflict, local security forces in Bahrain, the other protected states, as well as Muscat and Oman, took on added importance for Britain.

### 3.5 Gulf Indigenous Forces and Global War, 1938-45

In the lead up to the Second World War, RAF Command in Iraq was initially given responsibility for forming local defence schemes for protecting British interests along the Arab littoral, including the oil infrastructure and the air facilities which were vital for the strategic air route.<sup>270</sup> At this stage, British planners identified the principle threats as sabotage or attacks by neighbouring tribes. Since a concerted enemy air or sea attack was ruled out, the initial review concluded that local security forces would be more important adjuncts to Britain's stretched military resources than fixed defensive positions.<sup>271</sup> Britain

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<sup>268</sup> Abdalla al-Tajir (1987), pp. 240-42. See also: Louay Bahry, 'The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?' *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (1997), p. 43. On the use of the State Police's horse cavalry during the demonstrations see: AWDU, 'Annual Report for 1357 (March 1938 – February 1939),' *Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1956: Volume II 1937-1942*.

<sup>269</sup> Strength of Police: Four Havildars, seven Naiks, 17 Lance Naiks, 240 Policemen, 17 Band members, 15 in the Camel Section; 16 in the Horse Section, five Indian Instructors, and 22 Camp followers.

<sup>270</sup> This responsibility was transferred to India in 1941, since India was considered better suited for building up land forces for the protection of the Gulf in the event of an Axis advance into the area.

<sup>271</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 48.

policy was therefore focused on developing local capabilities.<sup>272</sup> In some cases there were no established forces to work with, forcing Britain to improvise.

British involvement in Qatar was informal empire at its most “light touch”. An Exclusive Agreement with Qatar was not signed until 1916, but even then there was little direct political interference. A tradition of family-based factional opposition marked succession in Qatar in the first part of the twentieth century. When the First World War ended, Shaikh Abdullah bin Jasim Al Thani (r.1913-49), who had just become ruler, found his claim contested by a dozen brothers and cousins. He thus turned to Britain in 1916 in the hope that it would guarantee his position.<sup>273</sup> To be sure, the treaty bolstered the position of Abdullah, but he was still vulnerable to machinations of other powerful clans.<sup>274</sup> One such practical method for limiting the power of rivals in the peninsula was making the Al Thani ruler the sole legal distributor of weapons. The 1916 treaty gave Shaikh Abdullah the authority alone to purchase arms (up to 500 rifles annually) from the Muscat arms warehouse, which he was permitted to apportion to loyal tribesmen for maintaining order in the peninsula and protecting his frontiers. Shaikh Abdullah’s economic woes in the early 1930s – he was forced to mortgage his house at this time – were alleviated in 1935 when he signed an oil concession agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC).<sup>275</sup> The Qatari ruler now received an immediate payment of 400,000 Indian rupees with a further 150,000 Indian rupees paid to him per annum. As part of the 1935 agreement, the British, against its usual practice at the time, recognised Abdullah’s favourite son, Hamad, as heir apparent, helping to limit the potential for rival claimants to make a bid for power. The position of Shaikh Abdullah and his lineage was therefore strengthened by the agreement.<sup>276</sup> The agreement also contained a promise that Britain would defend Qatar by land against foreign attack (the 1916 agreement had promised only maritime protection). Whilst Shaikh Abdullah commanded the allegiance of

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<sup>272</sup> TNA CAB 104/71, CID, Overseas Defence Committee, ‘Persian Gulf: Defence Schemes for the Arab Side,’ 14 June 1939.

<sup>273</sup> Jill Crystal, ‘Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar,’ *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21 No. 4 (July 1989), p. 437

<sup>274</sup> Allen J. Fromherz, *Qatar: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2012), p. 69.

<sup>275</sup> Forerunner to British Petroleum (BP), APOC was formed in 1908 and became the primary supplier of oil to the Royal Navy.

<sup>276</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 71-5.

most of the tribes of eastern Qatar, they had little control over the tribes of western Qatar. The two sides fought it out. At the 1937 Battle of Zubara the Al Thanis prevailed. In this way, the Al Thanis had to fight for their supremacy over rival clans on the Qatari peninsula. With British backing for his named successor, a monopoly over arms and the rival tribes defeated, Shaikh Abdullah felt he had little need for a trained – and expensive, it must be said – unit along the lines of the levy corps in Bahrain and Muscat. With the success at Zubara, not to mention the earlier victory against the Ottomans at the Battle of Wajbah in 1893, there seemed little incentive to move away from use of allied tribal fighters. Nor, until the advent of war, was there pressure from Britain to do so.

As the Second World War approached, the India Office discussed whether there was a need to establish a locally raised guard force in Qatar to protect future oil sites. The Political Resident at that time, Trenchard Fowle, did not believe that Qatar would make a financial contribution towards such a project. Although Britain guaranteed to protect Qatar against attacks on his territory by sea (from 1916) and land (from 1935), it had also been made clear to Shaikh Abdullah that he was expected to take all reasonable steps for his own defence and for maintaining order within his own frontiers.<sup>277</sup> Whilst the Residency acknowledged that the Ruler could probably count on considerable support from loyal tribesmen, most of them carried antiquated rifles of doubtful offensive value.<sup>278</sup> The British defence scheme for Qatar, formed in the lead up to war, recommended that Britain encourage the Ruler to buy more arms and trucks for mobility; British military planners assessed that the Qatari terrain would render heavy armoured cars useless. Officials at the Residency were confident that in due course Shaikh Abdullah 'may be able to put into the defence pool two or three light lorries mounted with machine guns after the Kuwait pattern.'<sup>279</sup>

The efficacy of indigenous forces was also a concern for Britain in the Trucial States in the late 1930s. Along this stretch of the coast, Britain identified

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<sup>277</sup> TNA Air 23/660, Residency (Camp Bahrain) to Air Vice-Marshal C. Courtney (Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Iraq), 8 August 1938.

<sup>278</sup> IOR L/P&S/12/3727 Minutes of informal discussion held at the India Office to consider the Political Resident's memorandum regarding the defence of the Persian Gulf in the event of a major war, 11 April 1938.

<sup>279</sup> TNA Air 23/660, Residency (Camp Bahrain) to Air Vice-Marshal C. Courtney (Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Iraq), 8 August 1938.

its key security interest as the defence of the rest house fort and adjoining aerodrome in Sharjah and the continued use of the creek in Dubai for landing seaplanes. Because it was assessed that the Ruler in Dubai was not in a position to effectively protect the seaplane alighting area in the creek, in the event of an emergency Britain would switch to using creeks in Ras al-Khaimah. Securing the facilities in Sharjah was more difficult. During the war, the airfield at Sharjah became an important air station for the RAF, which began stationing operational aircraft there in June 1940.<sup>280</sup> In Britain's view, the Ruler had 'far too little control in his own state for us [Britain] to be able to place any real reliance in him or even in the small guard which he provides at present.'<sup>281</sup> In accordance with a 1932 Agreement to use the airstrip in Sharjah, the British had been paying the Ruler to supply 40 guards, arming these men with service rifles.<sup>282</sup> After auditing these arrangements, British military officials in Iraq, who were given primacy for the defence of the Gulf in the event of global war, concluded that the guards were of little practical value; worse, they might actually pose a danger in an emergency. Except for sentries, the report recommended that the rifles of guards should be withdrawn and kept in the arsenal of the rest house fort. The small guard force provided by the Ruler proved ineffective at stemming the pilfering of ammunition and equipment at the RAF camp by Bedouin. British military planners felt compelled to bring in a company of RAF Levies from Iraq to guard RAF Sharjah in 1943-44.<sup>283</sup>

Some of the local rulers proactively wanted to improve their own capabilities. In Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad instructed Belgrave as early as 1938 to request from Britain more machine guns for the State Police and two or three anti-aircraft guns so that, should war break out, he had the means to defend his country, especially the oil refinery.<sup>284</sup> This, as it turned out, was a prescient request. Bahrain was subject to one of the longest, though ineffective, bombing

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<sup>280</sup> Stanley-Price (2013), p. 96.

<sup>281</sup> IOR R/5/2/703, Office of the Political Resident (Signed by Hugh Weightman as acting Political Resident) to Air Vice-Marshal C. Courtenay (Habbaniya), 8 August 1938.

<sup>282</sup> Thirty-seven of these men were posted to the fort and three to the Agency in Sharjah town.

<sup>283</sup> Stanley-Price (2013), p. 156.

<sup>284</sup> IOR R/15/12/703, Charles Belgrave (Adviser to the Government of Bahrain) to Hugh Weightman (Political Agent, Bahrain), 1 May 1938.

raids of the war. In October 1940, Italian aircraft, flying from the Dodecanese islands carried out a failed sortie on the oil refinery.<sup>285</sup>

On the 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany and the refinery was immediately put on a wartime footing. Despite Shaikh Hamad's efforts to expand the State Police (from 250 men in 1938 to 300 the following year with plans to add a further 50), the Political Resident had little faith that the force, even when supported by the *Naturs*, were adequate to prevent sabotage against Bahrain's important oil facilities. The police and *Naturs* were 'rather poor material when removed from the loving care and constant attention of Belgrave,' Reginald Alban, the Political Agent sardonically told the Political Resident in October 1939.<sup>286</sup> In an effort to improve capabilities, the Political Agency ordered motorbikes from India to speed up the patrol work done by the camel corps.<sup>287</sup> Also, the Government of India sent an Indian Army NCO to train Bahraini policemen in the use of the machine-gun.<sup>288</sup>

The Resident seized upon the Political Agent's suggestion in early 1939 that, if war came – and it was looking more likely at this stage that this would be the case – British oil workers should be armed with half a dozen machine-guns and as many rifles as possible.<sup>289</sup> A British officer was appointed to train a volunteer oil worker force in the use of the Bren gun, which, with anti-aircraft mountings, could in a perfunctory way be used to defend the refinery from low-flying aircraft.<sup>290</sup> When war broke out, BAPCO, the British Government and the Bahrain Government collaborated to strengthen Bahrain's forces for wartime security measures. Over 150 Bahraini special policemen were employed by BAPCO for oil facility protection and anti-sabotage work. BAPCO, which paid for the majority of the costs associated with improving wartime security, were critical of the volunteer force organised from among the oil workers.<sup>291</sup> BAPCO's

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<sup>285</sup> Robin Bidwell, 'Bahrain in the Second World War', in Michael Rice and Tariq Almoayed (eds.) *Bahrain through the Ages: The History* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1993).

<sup>286</sup> TNA FO 371/23177, Hugh Weightman (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Prior (Political Resident), 14 October 1939.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> AWDU, 'Annual Report for 1358 (March 1939 – February 1940),' *Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1956: Volume II 1937-42*.

<sup>289</sup> TNA AIR 23/5895 Hugh Weightman to Major Young (Iraq Levies), undated (c. first half of 1939)

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> Clarke (1991), pp. 167-8.

General Manager, Mr. Lipp, thought that the British officer assigned to train the oil workers, Byard, was 'incapable either of organising the Volunteer Defence Force or of maintaining discipline in it. His manner and deportment are unsuitable and he has become an open laughing stock with the British personnel.'<sup>292</sup> As for the work of the special police, Lipp told the Political Agent in Bahrain that this was done 'in a very dilatory and negligent manner and that there was no real defence against sabotage if sabotage were really intended.' For Lipp, the only 'bright spot' was the BAPCO-employed police of 75 men, who, being servants of the Company, showed a proper sense of duty in their work. In response, the Political Agent recommended replacing Byard as quickly as could be managed with another officer from India.<sup>293</sup>

When the ruling family was told that a British police expert, Hallows, would be visiting Bahrain to inspect local security arrangements, they responded that they hoped his proposals would not be based too closely on Indian practices, which they thought were unsuitable to Bahrain. After spending a month in Bahrain in 1940, Hallows observed that the 350-man State Police (including 22 mounted policemen and the 18 men of the camel section)<sup>294</sup> were more like a military force, protecting Bahrain against tribal attacks from the mainland or suppression of internal disturbances. Because training was carried out along military lines, he believed that civil police work was poor. His chief recommendation was to split the State Police into military and civil wings,

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<sup>292</sup> The Political Agent in Bahrain, Hugh Weightman, had urged London that a British officer be appointed to run the volunteer oil worker force, otherwise the 'scheme would be doomed to failure, and frankly it would not be worthwhile taking the trouble to bring it into existence.' IOR R/15/2/661, Reginald Alban (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Prior (Political Resident), 20 November 1940. On the Local Defence Volunteers see multiple files from AIR 23/5992 and AIR 23/5896.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> The force comprised eight Havildars, 12 Naiks, 28 Lance Naiks and 298 men. With an estimated 150,000 people this worked out at one policeman for every 445 people in Bahrain. Of these, 241 were Bahrain Arabs, 23 Baharna, 27 Persians, 7 Baluchis, 5 Indians, 1 Somali and the rest Sudanese, Swahilis, Yeminis, mainland Arabs and manumitted slaves. In addition to this, there were 70 *Naturs* in Manama and 50 in Muharraq. The Duty of the Camel Patrol was to patrol the coast and more inaccessible parts of the Island. The camel section sent out four-man patrols for four days at a time. As soon as one patrol came in, another was sent out. The general route followed was: Budaya, Zekrit, Amar, Muttals, Dair, Jau, Askar, Sitra and back to the fort. The Mounted (Horse) Police did not patrol and always remain present at Headquarters.

offering to stay in Bahrain to mentor the latter.<sup>295</sup> Commenting on Hallows report, the Political Resident concluded: 'We should be under no delusion that the errors and omissions disclosed will not be remedied unless there is constant supervision by a British officer.'<sup>296</sup> The Political Agent, Hugh Weightman, however, warned that the ruling family would 'resent the suggestion that their police are so inefficient that they need to be pulled together by a British Police Officer.' Moreover, one of the leading Al Khalifah shaikhs was attending courses in Bombay on the understanding that he would take charge of the State Police on his return. Weightman thought this was an important consideration. There would be little hope of popularising service in the State Police 'for men of better class' unless it was headed by one of the Al Khalifah family.<sup>297</sup> Weightman fretted that the Ruler, Shaikh Hamad, would not take well the suggestion that the State Police needed fixing, for he had been 'congratulated by Kings, Admirals, Ambassadors and lesser men on the appearance of their Police.'<sup>298</sup> Yet the Political Resident told Weightman to bring the point home to the ruling family that just because they have a body of men that could impress visitors with ceremonial displays that they did not necessarily possess an efficient police force.<sup>299</sup> Before the Allied victory over the Axis, Britain loaned Bahrain a detachment of seven British police officers to handle criminal cases involving the increasing number of European and American construction workers in the oil industry.<sup>300</sup>

The ability of Britain's Gulf representatives to shape the State Police was limited compared to that of *al-Mustashar*. This caused British officials some consternation. The Resident complained to his superiors in the Government of

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<sup>295</sup> He also recommended getting rid of the band and the mounted section as Arab ponies were too 'hot' for crowd control. IOR R/15/1/348, Hugh Weightman (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Geoffrey Prior (Political Resident) enclosing a report by R. Hallows on the administration, staffing methods of operations and improvements to the Bahrain Police, 24 May 1940.

<sup>296</sup> IOR R/15/1/348, Prior to Weightman, 1 June 1940

<sup>297</sup> IOR R/15/1/348, Weightman to Prior, regarding Hallows' report on the Bahrain Police, 24 May 1940.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> The Political Resident thought the ruling family would 'probably cry if you try and take their [police] band away. If they press strongly for its retention, I should be inclined to let it stay.' IOR R/15/1/348, Prior to Weightman, 1 June 1940.

<sup>300</sup> AWDU, 'Annual Report for year 1364 (Jan 1945 - Dec 1945),' Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1956: Volume III 1942-46. One of the seven was Ronald Cochrane who went on to Qatar in 1949 to set up that state's police force.

India that Belgrave knew 'nothing about police work.'<sup>301</sup> Musing why Belgrave clung so tenaciously to his position as commander of the police, Prior suggested it was for the extra money he received. Over the course of the war, the Political Resident became increasingly dismayed with Belgrave, a man he felt whose 'mental capacity has not kept pace with the growth of Bahrain, and owing to 15 years in a debilitating climate [ . . . ] appears to me to be losing his mental grip.'<sup>302</sup> After Shaikh Hamad's death in February 1942, Shaikh Salman continued his father's close relationship with *al-Mustashar*. The privately employed British adviser would retain his central position in the Bahrain state, including his oversight of the police, for more than a decade after the war's end.

Similar to Bahrain, the oil company in Kuwait paid for additional guards who were handpicked by the Ruler. Additionally, as a wartime measure automatic weapons and rifles were kept at the oil field facilities for use by British and American oil workers in case of an emergency.<sup>303</sup> A small contingent of British police was posted to the main oil camp in order to deal with incidents involving workers under British jurisdiction. As for the fledgling Kuwaiti military, a British training team from RAF Command in Iraq instructed the security forces in armoured car drills. Commenting on the wartime value of the Kuwaiti troops, British military officials believed they were 'efficient from an Arab standard and would give a good account of themselves in any fight under Arab conditions.'<sup>304</sup> Further improvements could be made, they argued, by holding combined exercises with RAF armoured cars and aircraft, and by providing weapon instruction by a British officer.<sup>305</sup>

In Muscat, the Sultan cut his military down further just as war broke out. This was bad news for British officials who feared that agents of hostile European powers might assist and encourage tribes of the interior to once

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<sup>301</sup> Op. cit. from Abdalla al-Tajir (1987), pp. 249-51.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> IOR R/15/5/378, Military Report and Route Book: The Arabian States of the Persian Gulf, General Staff India, Simla, Kuwait Section, 1939.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> However, the RAF inspecting officer wrote: 'Care would have to be taken to ensure that the national characteristics or "individuality" are not destroyed in any attempt to improve the efficiency of the Force, since it is on this individuality and initiative that the Arab's efficiency depends in a fight under Arab conditions.' FO 371/23175, Major R. J. Price, GS02, Air HQ, Iraq, 'Appreciation of the Situation Regarding the Defence of Kuwait against Tribal attacks and Sabotage,' January 1939.



again challenge his rule.<sup>306</sup> The British assessed that potentially several thousand tribesmen, armed with old fashioned rifles, could be induced to advance on Muscat, but that they would be incapable of putting in a successful attack on even a small force defending the key passes, so long as those guarding the approaches to Muscat were well-armed and trained. In terms of staying loyal to the Sultan in an emergency, British military planners assessed in 1939 that, because the Muscat Infantry were mostly Baluchis, they were not liable to be affected by local propaganda and could be trusted. As Britain would probably not be able to spare a sloop or send RAF aircraft to support the Sultan, it wanted Muscat's own defence forces as strong as possible 'so that they can deal with any likely trouble with their own resources.'<sup>307</sup> The main difficulty in strengthening Muscat's local forces was lack of money – any improvements would have to be at Britain's expense. RAF Command in Iraq judged that any minor expense incurred in connection with re-equipping and training were worth the cost and would be, at any rate, far cheaper than reinforcing the Muscat Infantry from India.<sup>308</sup> Britain therefore granted the Sultan a wartime subsidy to offset the cost of making defensive improvements and provided additional arms and equipment. The Muscat Infantry had already acquired three 3-pounder guns in April 1938. The Sultan was now asking Britain to supply him with a large supply of ammunition and modern mountain artillery, offering future payments from the Zanzibar subsidy as collateral.<sup>309</sup> Whilst the Sultan had been increasing his sway across the Oman interior largely by peaceful means, the Political Agent ruminated that the acquisition of a large stock of arms and ammunition might induce some influential shaikhs 'who have not yet made up their minds to forsake the Imam [of Oman] for His Highness

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<sup>306</sup> TNA FO 371/23176 Residency (Bushire) to Secretary of State for India, 15 August 1939.

<sup>307</sup> TNA FO 371/123175, Report by Major Price (GSO II Air HQ, Iraq), 'Appreciation of the situation regarding the defence of Muscat against tribal attack and sabotage,' January 1939.

<sup>308</sup> The plan in 1939 was for India to prepare to despatch to Muscat in emergency a force of one battalion of Infantry. Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> TNA FO 371/23176, Translation of a letter from Sultan Said bin Taimur to Capt. Tom Hickinbotham (Political Agent, Muscat), 16 July 1939. On the origins of the Zanzibar subsidy see: J. Forbes Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and His Business Network, 1923-93* (UK: Boydell Press, 2003), pp. 155-7.

[the Sultan of Muscat].<sup>310</sup> The increase in the strength of the Sultan's armed forces through the introduction of modern weapons, stockpiled ammunition and better training was to the advantage of both the Sultan and Britain, provided there was no doubt – from the British perspective – on which side that force would be employed in an emergency.<sup>311</sup> In the hope of keeping the Sultan steered in the right direction, a British military adviser was posted to Muscat.<sup>312</sup> Though Muscat was officially neutral during the war, the Political Resident hoped that some kind of 'confidential bargain might be struck with the Sultan by which, in return for his receiving free re-arming and training, he would agree to let us use his waters and territory in time of war.'<sup>313</sup> The Sultan agreed to these terms, leading to greater British assistance in his security forces.

In receipt of the British war subsidy, the Sultan increased the Muscat Infantry to over 350 men and in 1942 the artillery section was expanded to troop size after the Sultan purchased three 3.7 inch Howitzers.<sup>314</sup> Before the outbreak of war, the Sultan had concluded that there was no longer a requirement for a British commander for the Muscat Infantry and employed an Indian instead. During the war, however, a British officer began retraining the force.<sup>315</sup>

The high stakes brought about by the outbreak of global conflagration made Britain take a pause and evaluate its security approach in Eastern Arabia. With Britain's military resources prioritized to more pressing theatres of the war, the value of local solutions for protecting British interests – chiefly oil facilities and air stations – took on a new importance. Before 1939, the Government of India had encouraged and helped some of the rulers to establish organized forces in response to specific security challenges: in Bahrain and Muscat the threat was internal; in Kuwait it was external in the shape of the *Ikhwan*. In the decades that followed the Second World War, the British Government – and the

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<sup>310</sup> TNA FO 371/23176, Capt. Tom Hickenbotham (Political Agent, Muscat) to Residency (Bushire), 'Defence of Muscat', 18 July 1939.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> This was Leslie B. Hirst.

<sup>313</sup> TNA FO 371/123175, Residency (Bushire) to Air-Vice Marshall J.H.S. Tyssen (Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Iraq), 1 March 1939.

<sup>314</sup> The 3.7 inch Howitzer superseded the 2.75 inch Mountain Gun following World War I. It was used by Mountain Artillery Regiments of the Royal Artillery and the Indian Artillery, and saw much service on the North West Frontier of India between the wars.

<sup>315</sup> Buttenshaw (2012), pp. 86-89.

Foreign Office more specifically – encouraged a widespread build-up of local forces to address and protect a broadening array of interests.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LOCAL FORCES IN A PERIOD OF HEIGHTENED BRITISH INVOLVEMENT, 1947-60

### 4.1 Local Forces and Foreign Office Policy, 1948-52

Historians have tended to depict the period after the Second World War as an irreversible retrenchment of Britain's world role – the 'Long Retreat', as C.J. Bartlett coined it back in 1972.<sup>316</sup> Yet, in the decades after 1945, Britain's involvement in the affairs of the Gulf Arab states deepened. A clear step change in the way Britain interpreted its responsibilities and obligations occurred during this period. A former Political Resident, Sir William Luce, would later remark: 'Foremost was the recognition that protection of the [Gulf Arab] States and responsibility for their external relations carried with them an indirect but nonetheless real responsibility for what went on inside the States.' Luce believes that at this time Britain realised that it 'should not be responsible for the protection of something rotten without assuming limited powers to make it sound.'<sup>317</sup> After Indian Independence in 1947, and the resulting transfer of responsibility to the Foreign Office for formulating British policy on the region, Britain began to extend its involvement in its protected states, as well as Muscat and Oman, beyond what the constitutional foundations – the treaty-bound rights and commitments – of its position specified.<sup>318</sup> Britain, however, did not shift from its informal imperial style; it continued to favour collaboration with local elites rather than coercion and top-down rule. The Foreign Office still told its British representatives in the area that their first duty was 'to cultivate direct,

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<sup>316</sup> C. J. Bartlett, *The Long Retreat: A Short History Of British Defence Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1972). The following on the similar theme of British decline are well worth consulting: Robert Blake, *The Decline of Power, 1915-1964* (London: Paladin, 1986); Michael Carver, *Tightrope Walking: British Defence Policy since 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1992); L. W. Martin, *British Defence Policy: The Long Recessional* (Adelphi Paper no. 61, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1969); F. A. Northedge, *Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy, 1945-1973* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974); David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy & World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 1991); David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

<sup>317</sup> TNA FO 371/174489, Sir William Luce (Political Resident) to Gordon Walker, 11 November 1964. In this letter, Luce provided historical background to Britain's role in the protected states.

<sup>318</sup> Helene Von Bismark, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

friendly, personal relations with the Ruler with whom he works.’<sup>319</sup> In many respects the stakes in the Gulf were higher for Britain after the Second World War than before it.

Expanding oil activities (both existing production as well as exploration) made stability of ever-increasing import. Ironically, the granting of oil concession rights served to ignite new territorial disputes and resurrect old ones. How was Britain to protect these growing interests? Britain largely dismantled the military architecture it had built up in the Second World War: air bases created or enlarged to meet wartime needs were abandoned or scaled back; the RAF Levies, brought in from Iraq by the RAF to guard airfields, were disbanded; the Indian Army sepoy who had operated the anti-aircraft guns along the coast were sent back to their home bases, and the volunteer oil workers in Kuwait and Bahrain stopped training. It is argued here that Britain increasingly turned to local solutions for the protection of these expanding interests.

Though responsibility for Gulf policy passed from the Government of India to the Foreign Office (via, for a year, the Commonwealth Relations Office), much of the old political and military architecture remained unchanged. The Political Resident remained at the apex of Britain’s cohort of representatives; the Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (SNOGP) still commanded the Gulf Naval Squadron; and the Air Office Commanding (AOC) in Iraq continued to be responsible for the defence of the RAF stations and staging posts in Eastern Arabia. Likewise, for a time Britain’s approach to protecting its position in the Gulf and meeting its treaty obligations largely continued as before. British planners still viewed the guns and landing parties from the frigates of the Royal Navy as the best means to respond to a crisis.<sup>320</sup> Indeed, in 1948 the Political Resident and Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Station worked in tandem to lobby their respective masters to increase the number of Gulf Squadron frigates from two to three.<sup>321</sup> In the event of a wider emergency, the practice of flying in troops from Iraq or the other Middle Eastern bases still formed the

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<sup>319</sup> TNA FO 371/82033, Residency (Bahrain) to Foreign Office, ‘Instructions for Political Officers in the Persian Gulf’, 13 March 1950.

<sup>320</sup> Britain’s defence chiefs felt that the Gulf Squadron needed a cruiser. TNA DEFE 5/8, Report of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, ‘Peacetime Strategic Requirements in the Arab World,’ 13 January 1948.

<sup>321</sup> This was later recalled by the Political Resident in: TNA FO 371/91315, Sir Rupert Hay to Foreign Office, 30 June 1951.

centrepiece of British defence planning.<sup>322</sup> This may have been sufficient in former years, but the Foreign Office and its officials in the Gulf now believed that Britain must take a more active role in the Gulf's internal affairs and this required constant management of the Gulf security scene, especially inland. Divisions opened up between British governmental departments over how Britain could best protect its interests, particularly its burgeoning oil activities.

In January 1948, senior British military officers stipulated that 'special consideration' must be given to the 'means of maintaining internal security in this [Eastern Arabia] area, so as to ensure that exploitation and development [of oil] can continue unhindered.'<sup>323</sup> As oil companies paid large sums for concession rights, some British officials felt that the local rulers were obligated – and in some cases they were in fact bound by specific agreements – to provide protection.<sup>324</sup> C.J. Pelly at the Bahrain Political Agency, for example, was adamant that the Ruler should not shirk from his commitment to employ the Bahrain State Police to protect oil workers and facilities in Bahrain.<sup>325</sup> 'The [oil] companies pay large sums in royalties and there are clauses in each of the concessions by which the rulers bind themselves to give such protection as is in their power; they should, I submit, be held to this,' Pelly wrote.<sup>326</sup> 'Primary responsibility for protection of oil installations and personnel,' the Foreign Office wrote to the British Middle East Office in Cairo, 'should rest with local police forces. This is the present position at Bahrain and Kuwait and we hope will be later at Qatar when state police force is formed there.'<sup>327</sup> In April 1948, the Political Resident, Sir Rupert Hay, threw his support behind the Ruler of Qatar's request for 1,600 rifles and armour-clad vehicles mounted with machine guns

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<sup>322</sup> Saki R. Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002), p. 13; Anthony Gorst, 'We Must Cut our Coat According to our Cloth: The Making of British Defence Policy, 1945-48,' in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-1991* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 100-101.

<sup>323</sup> TNA DEFE 5/66 British Defence Coordination Committee, Middle East, 'Defence of the Arabian Peninsula', Annex to Chiefs of Staff Meeting (56)106, 15 March 1956.

<sup>324</sup> TNA FO 371/75020 Secretary of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Foreign Office (draft letter undated). Attached as an Annex in a Note by War Office to Chiefs of Staff on opposition to the formation of a Levy Force, 23 February 1949.

<sup>325</sup> TNA FO 371/82175 C.J. Pelly, (Political Agency, Bahrain) to Sir Rupert Hay, 22 March 1949.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>327</sup> TNA FO 371/82075 Foreign Office to British Middle East Office (Cairo), regarding Persian Gulf Levy Force, 23 September 1949.

on the following grounds: 'the Shaikh genuinely requires the arms as the activities of the Petroleum Development (Qatar) Limited in the peninsula are rapidly expanding and he is responsible for the protection of their personnel and material.'<sup>328</sup> Hay's view dovetailed with what the War Office had advocated some months earlier. From its side, the British military could provide advice and assistance; however, it was ultimately up to the local rulers to improve 'such security forces as already exist, until they [were] capable of providing adequate immediate protection.'<sup>329</sup> Whilst this may have been the case for Kuwait, Bahrain and (hopefully) Qatar, it was recognised that it would be unrealistic for the leading shaikhs of the Trucial States or for the Sultan of Muscat to provide the same guarantees as they had less control over their interiors. The ruling shaikhs of the Trucial States kept retainers to whom they distributed British rifles.<sup>330</sup> In addition to this, the only forces that were employed were untrained *askars*, armed with antiquated rifles to man watchtowers in the frontier lands and forts in more substantial outlying settlements. To be sure, the more prominent of the Trucial rulers could gather sizeable camel-mounted tribesmen in times of need, but these were mobilized for raiding and quick sorties rather than keeping order over territory.<sup>331</sup> It would be several more years before the Sultan of Muscat could enter the oil-bearing interior with his own forces, let alone guarantee the protection of oil prospecting parties.

One solution was that oil companies set up and pay for their own guard forces. Britain's military planners could countenance this suggestion on the condition that any force formed would be under the authority of the local ruler –

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<sup>328</sup> TNA FO 371/68345 Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 30 April 1948. Under Article 3 of the Treaty of 1916 between Britain and Ruler of Qatar the British Government was responsible for selling the Ruler such arms and ammunition as he may reasonably need. His requirements were stated in the Article as up to 500 weapons yearly. The ruler had not applied for permission to import arms since 1938. TNA FO 371/68350, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows (FO), 20 May 1949.

<sup>329</sup> TNA FO 371/75020 Secretary of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Foreign Office (draft letter undated). Attached as an Annex in a Note by War Office to Chiefs of Staff on opposition to the formation of a Levy Force, 23 February 1949.

<sup>330</sup> Julian Walker, *Tyro on the Trucial Coast* (Durham: Memoir Club, 1999), p. 37. In 1949, Britain received requests to sell 20 and 30 rifles to the rulers of Umm al-Quwain and Ras al-Khaimah respectively. Britain agreed to provide the Ruler of Sharjah with 74 rifles should he sign the new Civil Air Agreement. TNA FO 371/68350, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows (FO), 20 May 1949.

<sup>331</sup> The large raids conducted during the Abu Dhabi-Dubai war (1946-8) are an illustrative example of the ability of the Trucial States rulers to mobilise tribesmen for short periods.

there would be no private armies.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, this was the approach that was later taken in Oman (see below). Shaikh Zayed, the Governor of Al Ain, did provide oil prospecting parties with armed guards, but each time a local boundary was reached a new set of local tribesmen had to be found and furnished with payment.<sup>333</sup> A different approach was therefore needed for the Trucial States.

Writing to the British Chiefs of Staff about the difficulties of protecting the growing number of British oil personnel operating, or wanting to operate, in Trucial Oman, Foreign Office officials proposed establishing a British-officered levy force. Setting up a unit similar to the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) – similar in that it would be locally raised, commanded by British officers and wholly or partly bankrolled by the British tax payer – would be, the Foreign Office tried to convince the British Chiefs of Staff, a useful adjunct to Britain's conventional military forces. Although the proposed British-run levy force would be based in the Trucial States, the Foreign Office argued that it could also be used up and down the Gulf to protect Britain's wider interests. The Joint Planning Staff in London felt that a force of levies might prove useful, but doubted that the cost of such a scheme would pass through the styptic Defence Vote.<sup>334</sup> When asked for their views, British military planners in the Middle East came out against the idea. For a start, such a force would be needed only *after* oil was discovered, when oil workers and valuable assets began arriving. Oil companies were some way from reaching this stage in the Trucial Oman area. Also, because trouble in the area was limited to minor tribal disputes, and as Sharjah airfield – identified as Britain's only military asset of real value in the area – was not seriously threatened, they felt the costs involved in the Foreign Office's levy force proposal outweighed the benefits.<sup>335</sup> Moreover, the Chiefs of Staff rejected the Foreign Office proposal on practical as well as financial grounds. Not only would this force lack the mobility to respond to events up and down Eastern Arabia, it would, owing to a paucity of suitable recruits, be near

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<sup>332</sup> Petroleum Concessions Limited (PCL), headquartered in Sharjah, wanted to form a small levy force to protect exploration activities in the Buraimi area. TNA FO 371/75018, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows, (Foreign Office), 30 December 1948.

<sup>333</sup> Mann (1994), pp. 18-19.

<sup>334</sup> TNA DEFE 5/8, Report of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, 'Peacetime Strategic Requirements in the Arab World,' 13 January 1948.

<sup>335</sup> TNA FO 371/75018, Commander-in-Chief GHQ Middle East Land Forces to Ministry of Defence, 12 January 1949.



impossible to establish in the first place. If Britain needed troops to intervene in Kuwait, Qatar or Bahrain – the most important states in terms of British interests – Britain should stick, they argued, to the existing plans of flying in regular units.<sup>336</sup> By February 1949, a 'Persian Gulf Levy Force' commanded by British officers seemed dead in the water. Developments in 1949, however, resurrected the idea.

The need for an armed unit to escort Britain's representatives travelling in unruly parts of the Trucial States, who were involved at the time in settling incendiary boundary disputes, was underscored when the Bani Kitaab tribe in the Buraimi oasis area fired upon British officials.<sup>337</sup> But what really breathed new life into the idea of establishing a British-run force for the area was the slave trade, which had again become very profitable in Trucial Oman during the late 1940s.<sup>338</sup> When the British explorer Wilfred Thesiger emerged on the Trucial Coast in the spring of 1949 after travelling across southeast Arabia, he arrived with a first-hand account of the slave trade flourishing in Buraimi oasis. Thesiger told British representatives that the trade had become so blatant that he observed a party of 43 slaves 'being driven out of Buraimi like cattle, their owners having reverted to the more brutal and less expensive methods of former days.'<sup>339</sup> Whilst the importation of slaves by sea had largely been suppressed by naval action, the new practice of abducting residents in the Trucial States and selling them into slavery could only be confronted on land. In Thesiger's opinion, 100 men with modern rifles might suffice to establish law and order in the interior and to put down the slave trade.<sup>340</sup> The influence Thesiger had on the Political Resident, Sir Rupert Hay, and his subordinates is visible in the despatches they sent back to the Foreign Office. Thesiger's

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<sup>336</sup> TNA FO 371/75020, Draft Letter from Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to Foreign Office, undated. Attached as an Annex in a Note by War Office to Chiefs of Staff on the opposing the formation of a Levy Force, 23 February 1949.

<sup>337</sup> Mann (1994), p. 23; and Lunt (1981), p. 91. For an account of the disputes caused by oil exploration and concession agreements, see Wilkinson (1991).

<sup>338</sup> Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London: Motivate Publishing, 2007), p. 312; Walker (1999), p. 13; and Mann (1994), pp. 7 and 23.

<sup>339</sup> TNA FO 371/82072, P.D. Stobart, (Political Officer, Trucial States) to C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Bahrain), 'Notes on conversations with Wilfred Thesiger,' 17 April 1949. See also Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands* (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 282-4.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

reports were also taken seriously in London; it seems more than coincidental that it was at this time that the British government gave the question of quelling the slave trade its fullest attention.

Alive to the damage that reports of slaving could do to Britain's international standing, the War Office nonetheless ruled out deploying British troops to the area or bombarding slave camps from air and sea. It was as much by default, then, that the Foreign Office's proposal for a levy force was back on the table – this time with the new purpose of destroying the slave trade.

As a stopgap measure until a force could be raised from scratch, Sir Rupert Hay initially proposed that Britain send a detachment of Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) to deal with the slavers and base them in Sharjah. Thesiger convinced Sir Rupert to drop the idea. He thought the Adenis were 'of poor quality, they speak a different language from the local tribesmen and [. . .] would cut no ice and certainly not inspire the local tribesmen to enlist.'<sup>341</sup> Heeding Thesiger's advice, Sir Rupert hoped that the British-led Jordanian Arab Legion, which was reducing its strength, could provide a detachment in the short term whilst the recruitment of local tribesmen was underway.<sup>342</sup> When the earlier idea of the 'Persian Gulf Levy Force' was muted, Britain's most senior military officers in the Middle East ruled out the recruitment of local Arabs on the grounds that they were unsuitable; the assumption was that Iraqi Assyrians or Somalis would fill the ranks of any new force.<sup>343</sup> Extending this prejudicial scope, the Political Agent in Bahrain, C.J Pelly, believed Britain would have to look even farther afield. 'We agree,' Pelly wrote to Sir Rupert,

[. . .] that Baluchis do not make reliable soldiers. The little I have seen and what I have heard of Somalis disposes me to believe that they are unreliable, temperamental and in fact thoroughly difficult people to manage. I do think, though, that the idea of employing Indian or Pakistani mercenaries might be entertained, officered of course by British ex-Indian Army officers.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows (Foreign Office), 20 May 1949.

<sup>343</sup> TNA FO 371/75018, Commander-in-Chief GHQ Middle East Land Forces to Ministry of Defence, 12 January 1949.

<sup>344</sup> TNA FO 371/82172, C.J. Pelly, (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Sir Rupert Hay, 22 March 1949.

Thesiger, whose advice now extended to the composition of the putative levy force, urged the Political Resident not to discount local Arab tribesmen. In a letter to the Foreign Office in May 1949, Sir Rupert Hay relayed Thesiger's thoughts.

[Thesiger] thinks that if a good officer can be found he should be able to raise a force recruited from the Bedouin tribes and not the local riff-raff of the coast in a period of about three years. He is of the opinion that these tribesmen would enlist if they were well paid, fed and clothed and that they are not less promising material than [Major-General John Bagot] Glubb [British Commander of the Jordanian Arab Legion] had to work on to begin with.<sup>345</sup>

At the same time, the Foreign Office sought the views of Glubb himself, who was fortuitously in London. Major-General Glubb (or Glubb Pasha, as he was popularly known) was, like Thesiger, quick to expurgate the disparaging views some British officials held about the suitability of the local men. When the Arab Legion began, he told Foreign Office officials at the May 1949 meeting, it started with the 'most intractable material but soon found that even the wildest Bedouin could be trained to perform with mechanised equipment and signals work. It was very much a matter of training.' Due to their arduous climate and lifestyle, Glubb surmised that the locals in the area may prove a tough bunch. With modern weapons and travelling in jeeps or a lorry, Glubb believed that the local Arabs would 'be a match for anyone they were likely to meet.'<sup>346</sup> Whilst the Foreign Office had in the first instance tilted towards bringing in soldiers from abroad, they were now convinced that the advantage lay in local recruiting. For one thing, local men would supply better intelligence and local knowledge than recruits from outside, which would be crucial for anti-slaving tasks. Also, by providing employment for their followers, the force could also reconcile the leading local shaikhs into accepting it.<sup>347</sup>

In August 1949, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, informed the Cabinet that he was recommending 'the establishment of a small local force under British command [. . .] with the primary object of stopping the trade in slaves,

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<sup>345</sup> TNA FO 371/82072, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows (Foreign Office), 'Notes of conversation with Wilfred Thesiger,' 4 May 1949.

<sup>346</sup> TNA FO 371/82172, Record of Foreign Office Meeting with Arab Legion Representatives, 6 May 1949.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

which has recently increased.<sup>348</sup> The Treasury later sanctioned the funds for the formation of what came to be called the Trucial Oman Levies (TOL). The soon-to-be-established TOL was something different than other British organised forces in the area that had come before it – this was a British project, paid for by the Foreign Office and under the delegated authority of the Political Resident.

As an extemporal measure, a small contingent from the Jordanian Arab Legion would be flown in, around which the Levies would be built up with local recruits. Before deciding on setting up the force, Britain did not canvass the views of the local rulers and their sanction was never sought; Sir Rupert Hay did not see the need to ask for the Shaikhs' consent, 'but simply notify them of what we intend to do.'<sup>349</sup> Visceral opposition to the levy force did come, but from outside the Trucial States. In December 1950, Ibn Saud lodged his first formal protest against formation of the British levies because it represented, in his mind, an aggressive move against Saudi Arabia.<sup>350</sup> Ibn Saud was impervious to the argument that such a small force could hardly constitute aggression. No real thought was given to abandoning or even delaying the force's formation due to Saudi pressure. At any rate, it was thought Ibn Saud had 'become so crotchety and unreasonable that he can only be dealt with either by giving way completely to his demands or by standing firm against him.'<sup>351</sup> The Saudi Ambassador in London told British officials off the record that Ibn Saud's objections derived from his fear that the Arab Legion personnel forming the core of the new force would promote anti-Saudi propaganda amongst the tribes in the Trucial States. Some in the Foreign Office did suggest not sending Arab Legion instructors. Glubb and Resident Hay quickly retorted that the creation of the TOL was impossible without them.

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<sup>348</sup> TNA CAB 129/36, 'Middle East Policy,' Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin, 25 August 1949 (Circulated 26 August 1949). In the attached Annex, titled 'Some of the Tasks of British Policy in Individual Middle East Countries,' it was re-emphasised that '[t]he slave trade must be stopped. A Levy Force should be created for this purpose in the Trucial Coast.'

<sup>349</sup> TNA FO 1016/193, Note by C.M. Rose (Foreign Office), Record of Discussion with Sir Rupert Hay on 30 June 1950, 'Trucial Oman Levies', 3 July 1950.

<sup>350</sup> Mann (1994), p. 24.

<sup>351</sup> TNA FO 371/91310, Foreign Office Minute, 'Trucial Oman Levies,' 22 January 1951.

The Treasury only earmarked sufficient funds for 70 men. Glubb had prepared for the Foreign Office a detailed proposal – including a putative budget, equipment list and the pay scales – for a much larger force. Nevertheless, at the end of February 1951 Major J.M. Hankin-Turvin, who had been decorated for his bravery in Jerusalem during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, travelled from Jordan to Sharjah (the TOL's headquarters) to assume command. He was joined by two Arab officers and 30 other men from the Arab Legion. The War Office provided a small consignment of weapons (30 rifles, two Bren light machine-guns, and 2-inch mortars) and vehicles (six Land Rovers and four 3-ton trucks).<sup>352</sup>

Amongst the early local security forces the TOL were *sui generis* in that they were a wholly British-controlled force operating in the territory of the Trucial States. The main duties of the TOL, as outlined in the Directive of 22 April 1951, were threefold: '(i) to maintain peace and good order in the Trucial States; (ii) to prevent or suppress any traffic in slaves; and (iii) to provide and escort for any British representatives travelling in the Trucial States.'<sup>353</sup> The force also had specific powers of arrest that in theory could be exercised in any part of the territory of the Trucial States for the maintenance of law and order.<sup>354</sup> The men of the Trucial Oman Levies, one chronicler of the force notes, were in an anomalous position: 'although their officers were British regulars and the Levies were paid by the Foreign Office, the men took no oath of loyalty, so that traditional forms of military law were on an uncertain foundation.'<sup>355</sup> Britain made great efforts to present the TOL as a force that existed in the interests of the rulers.<sup>356</sup> Two months after its inception, for example, the Levies provided an honour guard at the funeral of the Ruler of Sharjah, Shaikh Sultan bin Saqr al-Qasimi.<sup>357</sup> For the first months of its existence, the Levies visited the local rulers, recruited more men and undertook patrols.

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<sup>352</sup> Mann (1994), pp. 22-24.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>354</sup> A later directive added that except in an emergency the Levies were not to operate within a town which was the capital of a Trucial State ruler, or within the palace of a ruler, without the specific instruction of the political officers or his representative. Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>357</sup> Shaikh Sutan had in fact died in London where he had been there receiving medical treatment.

Britain intended the Arab Legion contingent to be a temporary measure to allow time to recruit locals. Britain's representatives questioned whether, beyond the unemployed migratory workers whom the oil companies had already rejected, the Levies could find suitable men amongst the population.<sup>358</sup> Replacement of the Arab Legion Jordanians took on an added urgency in May 1951 when there was a minor mutiny amongst them at their Sharjah base and several were discharged.<sup>359</sup> By the summer of 1951 the TOL had taken on enough men to patrol further into the interior, especially along the border with Oman. Largely acting on tip-offs, the TOL carried out a number of arrest operations against notable slave traders in this area. Those apprehended were prosecuted in the Trucial States Court. British representatives and Levy officers acted as legal defence and prosecution with a British judge deciding the verdict.<sup>360</sup>

The Levies struggled to keep up their coverage over the Trucial States. Beset by difficulties in recruiting men, the force numbered only one British Officer, 30 Jordanians and 50 local other ranks in October 1951. Britain approached the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) for instructors, and in December 1951 five ex-members of the APL came across to the TOL.<sup>361</sup> Despite early teething troubles, British representatives believed the TOL were having a stabilising influence in the area. The Political Officer for the Trucial States wrote in April 1951 that:

The mere presence of the Levies is having, as far as can be judged, a considerable effect. Their appearance, which is so markedly different from that of the average inhabitant of the coast, and their arms and equipment, which contrast even more strongly with those on general view here hitherto, both inevitably impress the natives and especially the Bedouin tribesmen.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> TNA FO 371/91311, C.J. Pelly to Sir Rupert Hay, 9 April 1951.

<sup>359</sup> Senior Arab Officer, a Bedouin, quarrelled with second Arab officer, a Palestinian, who was beaten up by a sergeant and other Bedouin Legionnaires at the instigation of the senior Arab officers. Arrangements were made to send the senior Arab officer and his sergeant by air back to Amman, but Legionnaires refused to let them go, forming a ring around the two men. TNA FO 371/91311, Sir Rupert Hay, to Foreign Office, reporting mutiny amongst Arab Legionnaires, 8 May 1951. For a more information on the Jordanian mutiny see Mann (1994), pp. 29-30.

<sup>360</sup> Walker (1999), pp. 18-21.

<sup>361</sup> Clayton (1999), p. 27.

<sup>362</sup> TNA FO 371/91311, A.J. Wilton (Political Officer, Trucial States) to L.A.C. Pinhey (Bahrain Agency), 4 April 1951.

In the early part of the Levies' existence, the force dealt chiefly with incidents that in other places might be considered police matters but which in the Trucial States could lead to tribal warfare. In the summer of 1952, for example, the Levies, joined by a Royal Navy landing party of 60 sailors (bluecoats) and marines, broke up internal fighting in northern part of Ras al-Khaimah.<sup>363</sup> This was precisely the kind of preventative action that the British hoped the Levies would perform. Resident Hay, accompanying a routine TOL patrol soon after it was formed, gave his mixed observations:

The Levies who accompanied me perform their duties quietly and efficiently. To one with long acquaintance of the Indian Army and Frontier Corps they appear somewhat lax in their general behaviour and in their administrative and security arrangements. They lack spit and polish, there are no sanitary arrangements at their outposts and practically no attempt is made at picketing. This however appears to suit the Arab temperament and fortunately the Oman hills, though much like those of the North West Frontier Province of the old British India in appearance, harbour much less warlike and aggressive inhabitants.<sup>364</sup>

Faced with the need to move the Trucial States into an age of oil, Britain no longer assented to bloody accessions. The TOL now provided a tool to control this tradition. As the Political Officer at the time, John Wilton, explains:

It was possible for the British Government to frustrate the murderer's accession because the presence of the Levies, small force though they were, meant that an effective gesture could be made in time without mounting a ponderous combined operation involving British troops.<sup>365</sup>

The establishment of a local military force answerable ultimately to the Political Resident was a significant development in Britain's security approach to the region. As a reflection of what this meant, a Local Defence Committee (Persian Gulf) was established in 1951. Chaired by the Political Resident and comprising

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<sup>363</sup> John Wilton, 'Maintaining Law and Order,' in Paul Tempest (ed.), *Envoys to the Arab World: Volume II The MECAS Memoirs, 1944-2009* (London: Stacey International, 2009), pp. 173-4; and Mann (1994), p. 31.

<sup>364</sup> TNA FO 1016/168, Sir Rupert Hay, Despatch No. 38, 29 April 1952. For impressions of patrolling with the Levies see Ivor Lucas, *A Road to Damascus: Mainly Diplomatic Memoirs from the Middle East* (London: Radcliffe Press, 1997), pp. 39-40.

<sup>365</sup> Wilton in Tempest (2009), pp. 173-4.

the SNOFG, the Senior Air Officer Persian Gulf (SRAFOPG) and, after 1952, the Resident's Military Adviser, who was later titled the Senior Army Officer, Persian Gulf (SAOPG), the LDC (PG) acted as both an intelligence-sharing forum and a decision-making body for security matters up and down the coast.

As late as September 1949, some British officials had still referred to the proposed British-run local force as the 'Persian Gulf Levy Force' in the expectation that it might later set up an additional post in Qatar for keeping order in the northern Gulf as well.<sup>366</sup> Others had been quick to shoot down the idea of a British-run force that could be used in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. 'Bahrain as an Island has not the same need of protection from desert Bedouin and the RN [Royal Navy] is at hand in emergency', the Foreign Office concluded in September 1949. As for Kuwaiti oil facilities, the Foreign Office assessed that these were 'too far away to be covered by any force based on our more southerly protected states' and was, at any rate, 'comparatively well protected by oil company and state guards.'<sup>367</sup> (In addition, the Kuwait Oil Company hired its own Baluchi watchmen to counter pilfering of property.) Whilst the Levies would be of little value in protecting oil interests, some believed that they could be a distinct advantage in political matters. The Political Agent in Bahrain, C.J. Pelly, argued in 1949 that a mobile desert force capable of being flown in detachments to other parts of the Gulf unobtrusively (unlike the very public deployment of British troops) could be, 'a weapon of very great political advantage to us in the whole of the Gulf [. . . .] It could,' Pelly elaborated to the Political Resident, 'be used in Qatar or Kuwait where, as so often may happen, a show of force would be just what is required to tip the scales in our favour in a political issue.'<sup>368</sup> Pelly's arguments were prescient. When in the summer of 1949 Britain decided that it must safeguard the Qatari accession – it was unclear whether the incumbent Shaikh Ali would be accepted by powerful factions of the Al Thani ruling family – the acting Political Resident first suggested sending a British Arabic-speaking officer and a small detachment of Arab Legionnaires by air from Jordan in order to (a) assure the

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<sup>366</sup> TNA FO 371/82075, Foreign Office to British Middle East Office (Cairo) regarding Persian Gulf Levy Force, 23 September 1949.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.



accession, and (b) to begin training a local police force.<sup>369</sup> Rejecting this idea on the grounds that it would ‘involve too much delay and complication,’ the Foreign Office reverting back to the time-tested practice of landing an armed party from one of the frigates of the Gulf Squadron positioned off the Qatari coastline.<sup>370</sup> Later at the accession ceremony of Shaikh Ali, HMS *Flamingo* provided an armed honour guard. These were precisely the types of scenario in which Pelly thought a show of force from British-controlled Gulf-wide local force and would offer a better option than flying in British troops or landing bluecoats from a Gulf Squadron frigate.

With the Trucial Oman Levies constricted – in principle and in practice – to only operate in the lower Gulf, and as Britain wished to reduce the chances of being forced to intervene militarily in the northern Gulf, British representatives counselled the rulers of Qatar and Kuwait to employ British security experts to establish a force in the former and guide the existing security forces in the latter.

Even though they confirmed their pre-eminence over the peninsula at the Battle of Zubara in 1937, the Al Thani rulers never felt they could fully rely on the Qatari tribes, partly because many of them had branches in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the Trucial States. What is more, Shaikh Abdullah Al Thani faced mounting pressure from his extended family to distribute revenues from oil exports, which had begun in 1949. Vocal members of the family threatened to oppose him directly unless they received a greater share of the income. The death of the heir apparent, Shaikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani, in 1948 had thrown the succession issue into turmoil. On investigation, the Political Resident found the Ruler desperate to abdicate to his other son, Shaikh Ali. But Shaikh Ali would only take up the mantle if Britain confirmed that it would protect him from internal attacks. This was understandable, as some members of the Al Thani were backing the ruler’s grandson, Khalifa bin Hamad.<sup>371</sup> Abdullah and Ali’s weakness put Britain in an influential position to make its influence felt. To ensure that the passing of the baton from father to son went unopposed, the acting Political Resident, Jakins, oversaw the accession procedures, flanked by

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<sup>369</sup> The idea was that they bring their own arms, but would use local vehicles. TNA FO 371/74944 Residency (Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 16 August 1949.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, Foreign Office to Residency (Bahrain), 17 August 1949.

<sup>371</sup> Crystal (1989), p. 437.

an armed honour guard of British sailors from the Gulf Squadron from HMS *Flamingo*.<sup>372</sup>

British officials viewed the newly installed Shaikh Ali (r. 1949-60) as a 'rubber-stamp' ruler. His weak position in Qatar meant that he would be malleable to British wishes; on the other hand, it also meant he would need 'considerable propping up'.<sup>373</sup> Rather than have Shaikh Ali rely totally on British military support, Britain pressured the Qatari ruler to employ a British adviser with a police and military background whose first task would be to form a force capable of maintaining order in Doha and protecting the Shaikh from 'the intrigues of his numerous relatives'.<sup>374</sup> With Shaikh Ali isolated within his family and dependent on British support, Britain now had the leverage to impose British advisers and set in motion administrative reforms in Qatar.<sup>375</sup> The first task of the Political Officer, John Wilton, when he was appointed to Doha in 1949 was to encourage Shaikh Ali to develop a rudimentary administration.<sup>376</sup> The task was made more difficult by the fact that Shaikh Abdullah had taken the contents of the state treasury with him when he abdicated.<sup>377</sup> Shaikh Ali assented to British cajoling, employing a British security expert by the name of Ronald Cochrane, whom he hired from the Bahrain State Police.<sup>378</sup> Cochrane, who changed his name to Mohammad Mahdi upon his conversion to Islam in 1964, and remained at the heart of the Qatari security apparatus for decades after his appointment, arrived in 1949 with a small consignment of rifles on loan from Bahrain and began forming up a small armed police. In June 1952, the Qatari armed police were able to force the surrender of members of the Bani Ahmad section of the ruling family who had assaulted the director of customs and were holed up in their part of Doha. The SNOGP believed that this first

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<sup>372</sup> TNA FO 371/74944, Foreign Office to Residency (Bahrain), 16 August 1949.

<sup>373</sup> TNA FO 1016/61, Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 1 September 1949.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*; and FO 371/82003, 'Persian Gulf Annual Report, 1949', 31 January 1950.

<sup>375</sup> Rafid Ahmed Ameen, *Siyaasa Britaaniya Tijaah Qatar* (Cairo: Dar al-Ahmdah lil-Nashir, 2008), pp. 67-72; and Crystal (1995), p. 121. In late August 1949, a Political Officer was posted to Doha and four years later the post was upgraded to a Political Agent. Shaikh Ali appointed Group Captain Phillip Plant as his overall adviser. Plant proved to be inadequate, he was replaced two years later by Hancock who stayed in position until 1960.

<sup>376</sup>

<sup>377</sup> Wilton in Tempest (2009), p. 143.

<sup>378</sup> Rafid Ahmed Amin al-Alana, *Siyasat Britanyia tijah Dowlat Qatar* (Cairo: Dar al-Ahmedi lilnashr, 2007), pp. 86-7.

instance of the use of the police against the ruler's family was 'a most encouraging precedent'. Nevertheless, the police were not in possession of anything more lethal than rifles. Cochrane estimated that the Bani Ahmad gathered at the ruler's palace for negotiations had over 100 modern automatic weapons.<sup>379</sup> Although Britain was able to pressure Shaikh Ali into spending his revenue on a security force and British adviser, this did not guarantee that he would place his faith in his security apparatus. Shaikh Ali looked at the police as a foreign force and for some time preferred to rely on his immediate band of armed retainers (or *fidawiyya*) for his personal protection.

Britain encountered more resistance in Kuwait when it came to the appointment of British adviser. With expanding oil revenues and a rapid influx of foreigners in the late 1940s, Britain wanted Kuwait to develop its government structures and spend newly acquired wealth on infrastructure.<sup>380</sup> The Political Agent in Kuwait and the Political Resident worked assiduously to persuade the Al-Sabah family to accept a British financial adviser; they wanted the Ruler, Shaikh Ahmad, to take on a man who could 'exercise a preponderant influence in the administration of the State while keeping his personality in the background.' It was, Resident Hay informed the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, in April 1948, 'our primary objective at Kuwait.'<sup>381</sup> Although the Shaikh Ahmad rejected the appointment of an adviser, British officials did not let up. What is more, now they adjured Shaikh Ahmad to appoint a British security expert similar to Cochrane in Qatar. The inability to expedite this latter appointment frustrated British officials even more. By October 1948, Hay considered a British expert for Kuwait's police more urgent than a financial adviser.<sup>382</sup> Worried about the influx of unruly American and British oil workers, however, Britain wanted Kuwait to follow Bahrain's example and agree to employ a section of British police officers and to appoint a British

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<sup>379</sup> TNA FO 371/98330, Captain N.W. Fisher (SNOGP) to Commanding Officer HMS Flamingo, 'Description of Events in Doha 23 to 26 June 1952,' 10 July 1952.

<sup>380</sup> Ralph Hewins, *A Golden Dream: The Miracle of Kuwait* (London: W.H. Allen, 1963), pp. 241-51.

<sup>381</sup> Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin, 17 April 1948 in *Records of Kuwait: Foreign Affairs 1921-1950 II* (Archive Editions, 1989), p. 579. Hay even thought that an absence of Arabic would be a plus because it would make it difficult for anyone selected to 'come between the Shaikh and his people.' *Ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> TNA FO 371/68347, Sir Rupert Hay to Col. Galloway (Political Agent, Kuwait), 15 October 1948.

commandant.<sup>383</sup> Earlier in March 1948 the British Foreign Secretary signed off a 'King's Regulation' which gave the Political Agent in Kuwait, as District Magistrate, the power to appoint Special Police Officers from among those residents of Kuwait outside the jurisdiction of the Ruler.<sup>384</sup>

When in the latter half of 1948 Shaikh Ahmad again rejected the appointment of a former British superintendent of the Palestine Police, Middleton, as his adviser to the Public Security Department, the Political Agent, Colonel Galloway, could not hide his disappointment. He told Resident Hay in January 1949 that the Kuwaiti police were,

most certainly inefficient and quite unable to cope with the rapidly increasing number of foreigners pouring into this gold-rush state and the rapid change from slow animal transport to the onslaught of ill-trained drivers of high powered American cars.<sup>385</sup>

Shaikh Ahmad tried to convince Britain that there was no need for a British security adviser as he was on his own initiative doubling the size of his security forces and was hiring two British-trained Palestinians as police officers.<sup>386</sup> Shaikh Ahmad also agreed to appoint several British police officers to deal with people subject to the jurisdiction of the Political Agent under the Kuwait Order in Council. Moreover in 1949 Shaikh Ahmad appointed his cousin, Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak, to head a restructured Public Security Department, which controlled the armed gendarmerie but not the town police.<sup>387</sup> These measures, in the eyes of the Political Agency in Kuwait at least, laid the groundwork for great improvements in security scene.<sup>388</sup> Nonetheless, Britain kept up the

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<sup>383</sup> TNA FO 371/68345, Harrison (Commonwealth Relations Office) to L.F.L. Pyman (Foreign Office), 3 February 1948.

<sup>384</sup> These Regulations were cited as 'The Special Police Officers' Regulations, 1948'. Every Special Police Officer appointed would be given the same powers, privileges and protection as a regular police officer. Under these regulations, the Political Agent also had the authority to appoint a Chief Special Police Officer who would have the powers of an Officer-in-Charge of Police Station under the Criminal Procedure Code. See TNA FO 371/68345, 'Kuwait Notice No. 1 of 1948: King's Regulations under Article 83 of 'The Kuwait Order in Council, 1935'', 23 March 1948.

<sup>385</sup> TNA FO 371/74959, Col. Galloway to Sir Rupert Hay, 2 January 1949.

<sup>386</sup> IOR R/15/5/213, A.L.A. Dredge (Residency, Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 14 January 1949.

<sup>387</sup> At this time, the armed section of the Public Security Department became known as the Kuwait Force.

<sup>388</sup> TNA FO 371/98323, Kuwait Agency, 'Kuwait Administration Report for 1951,' undated.

pressure on Kuwaitis to employ a British security adviser similar to Ronald Cochrane in Qatar.

Deterring would-be opponents of Abdullah al-Salim's succession by sending a squadron of British armoured cars from Iraq and flying RAF Dakota aircraft overhead during the accession ceremony, probably put Britain in a stronger position to influence the new ruler on security matters. By 1950, there were three British police officers employed by the Public Security Department and in the same year two of the late ruler's sons, Shaikh Jabir and Shaikh Sabah, toured New Scotland Yard and the police training college at Hendon in England.<sup>389</sup> At the year's end, the Ruler requested that his agent in London (a British national by the name of H.T. Kemp) seek out, with Foreign Office guidance, suitable British experts for Kuwait's finance and customs departments. This appeared to signal the green light for the appointment of a security adviser.<sup>390</sup> However, when Britain again raised the matter of a British expert for the Public Security Department, Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak dug his heels in. Thought by the British to be untutored and harsh in his role as head of the Public Security Department, the Political Agent, Jakins, fretted that Shaikh Abdullah – also was considered by many to be Kuwait's likely future ruler – was becoming 'increasingly surrounded by a number of Palestinian and Syrian sycophants.' Rather than accepting this situation, Jakins recommended in November 1950 that Britain should try to win him over to British ways by placing a British security adviser alongside him.

With Abdullah Salim, physically, an aging man, the future of Kuwait is too great a stake to permit our running risks with Abdullah Mubarak's schooling. We should in my view take the earliest opportunity of putting a British official, in the form of a security expert, alongside Abdullah Mubarak to train him on the right lines.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> TNA FO 371/82139, J.A.F. Gethin (Kuwait Agency) to C.J. Pelly (acting Political Resident), 19 September 1950.

<sup>390</sup> Lt. Col. G.C.L. Crichton's was appointed to the Finance Department and Major-General W.F. Hasted's to the post of Chief Engineer. Crichton was derided by the Britain's representatives for being unequal to the task. See also Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 8-9.

<sup>391</sup> TNA FO 371/82010, H.G. Jakins (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Sir Rupert Hay, 16 November 1950.

Claiming that accepting a British adviser would result in a serious loss of face, Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak continued to reject the idea. Britain's inability to get the Kuwaiti leadership to agree to taking on a British security expert displayed the limitations of British influence in Kuwait.

With Cochrane's arrival in Doha in 1949 and the formation of the TOL in Sharjah two years later, there was now some form of organised professional security forces in all of the Gulf shaikhdoms within Britain's informal empire. The forces for Qatar and Trucial States were British initiatives designed to create a degree of order in these territories. British oil interests in Eastern Arabia became measurably more important after the Iranian government threatened to nationalise its oil fields.<sup>392</sup> Would a local approach to protecting this vital resource suffice?

In mid-May 1951, the new Iranian government of Prime Minister Mossadeq nationalised the South Persia oilfields and threatened to do the same to the massive Abadan refinery, Britain's largest overseas investment. As tensions mounted throughout July and August, Britain assembled forces for military action. The Cabinet decided that, in view of Washington's attitude against the use of force, the operation would not go ahead.<sup>393</sup> Britain evacuated employees at the refinery in September 1951, abandoning the facility on 3 October 1951.<sup>394</sup> The subsequent boycott of Iranian oil lifted Kuwaiti, Qatari, and (to a lesser extent) Bahraini hydrocarbon production to a previously

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<sup>392</sup> Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Steve Marsh, 'HMG, AIOC, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis: In Defence of Anglo-Iranian', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December, 2001) pp. 143-74.

<sup>393</sup> David R. Devereux, *The Formulation of British Defence Policy Towards the Middle East, 1948-56* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 104-5.

<sup>394</sup> For accounts on the discussion surrounding plans to retake the refinery see James Cable, *Intervention at Abadan: Plan Buccaneer* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1991); B. Donoughue and G. W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 498; C. J. Bartlett, 'The Military Instrument in British Foreign Policy,' in John Baylis (ed.), *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 38; TNA CAB 128/19, Cabinet Conclusions (51) 45<sup>th</sup> CC from Cabinet meeting held on 21 June 1951; and TNA CAB 195/9, Minutes from Cabinet Meeting held on 25 July 1951. Plans to evacuate British oil workers and their families from Iran centred on the flying in two infantry battalions and an assortment of transport, bomber and fighter aircraft. Naval forces would be those of the Gulf Squadron with a 6-Inch gun cruiser from the East Indies Station. If Iraq did not allow use of its bases (Habbaniya and Shaibah) for air and land forces, then Kuwait and Bahrain were earmarked to provide the operational bases. On the evacuation planning refer to David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East* (London: HMSO, 1980), pp. 53-55.

unimagined level of importance for Britain.<sup>395</sup> Was the British system for protecting these interests fit for task? The inter-departmental debates in Whitehall on the question of how best to protect oil interests in the Gulf continued into late 1951 and early 1952 and took a number of interesting twists and turns. The defence of Gulf oil should not be divorced from wider strategic discussions taking place at the time. After Winston Churchill returned to 10 Downing Street in the autumn of 1951, he initiated a review of Britain's global strategy.<sup>396</sup> Though the final report gave greater prominence to nuclear weapons in defence policy, Britain would retain traditional forces east of Suez area to protect its political and commercial interests.<sup>397</sup> Out of these traditional military resources, the Foreign Office and the Political Resident still favoured naval power as the most solid undergird to Britain's political position in the Gulf and the best means to respond to a crisis.

The Foreign Office believed that it was usually far quicker and certainly more discrete to land ashore a naval party from a frigate than it was to fly in troops from outside the Gulf. In June 1951, the LDC (PG) called for an expansion of the number of frigates from three to four to better defend British oil interests. The Admiralty first rejected the proposal, but the Foreign Office asked them to reconsider on the grounds that 'the present situation in the Persian Gulf merits very special consideration'. The Admiralty stuck to its position; there were simply not the resources available to commission an additional ship for the Gulf. With an increased naval presence ruled out, defence planners began to explore other options for the protection of British interests.<sup>398</sup>

At the time of the Abadan crisis, the British Chiefs of Staff Committee considered an RAF proposal to establish an operational air base at Kuwait and to station a small force of 50 British soldiers. Whilst this force would be there to

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<sup>395</sup> TNA FO 371/91315, Draft Letter from G.W. Furlonge (Foreign Office) to Brigadier Ewbank (Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, MoD), December 1951. See also: Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait 1950-1965: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Frank Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East: An Economic History, 1945-87* (London: Lester Crook Academic Publishing, 1989), see especially Chapter 2.

<sup>396</sup> John Baylis and Alan Macmillan, 'The British Global Strategy Paper of 1952,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1993) pp. 200-226

<sup>397</sup> Alan Macmillan and John Baylis, *A Reassessment of the British Global Strategy Paper of 1952* (published by the Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth in association with the Nuclear History Programme in 1993), p. 22.

<sup>398</sup> TNA FO 371/91315, Sir Rupert Hay to Foreign Office, 30 June 1951.

guard the proposed RAF base, British planners also felt that it could act in support of the Ruler if an attempt was made by outside interests to ferment internal unrest in an attempt to overrun his regime.<sup>399</sup> The Foreign Office, awaiting the views of the Political Resident, Sir Rupert Hay, let the defence chiefs know in advance its own doubts about 'whether such a force is required for protecting the Ruler, who is safeguarded from his immediate neighbours by our protection and against whom there seems to be no particular internal threat.'<sup>400</sup> Nonetheless, the idea to establish an RAF base in Kuwait was not dropped.

Simultaneously, John Bagot Glubb, whose advice had earlier been sought on establishing the TOL, proposed an ambitious plan to stand up a British-run Arab Army that could be used as a British military tool across the whole Middle East – in essence the Jordanian Arab Legion writ large. In the context of wider British post-Second World War defence thinking, Glubb's proposal was not as revolutionary as it might first appear. In January 1948, British defence planners in the Middle East called for the greater utilisation of the Arab forces in the event of war. Britain did not expect the militaries of Egypt and Iraq to withstand a full-scale attack; through training these forces and assisting them, British military officials thought that they 'might undertake not only internal security but also minor operational roles if used in conjunction with allied forces. We should therefore take every opportunity of organising and training them for these roles.'<sup>401</sup> Thus the idea that Arab armies could augment, or even be used in place of, British forces had already found a place in British defence policy circles. Glubb's concept for an Arab Army comprised three battalions (one raised in the Gulf, one in southern Arabia, and a third stood up in the Sinai), garrisoned across 'A Chain of Gibaltars' – i.e. bases established on islands or strips of land bought or leased from Middle Eastern states. As its soldiers would be able to operate in areas that possessed an unsuitable climate for British troops, it would offset the loss of the British Indian Army.

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<sup>399</sup> TNA DEFE 11/66, Minutes of Chiefs of Staff Committee (51)146, 17 September 1951.

<sup>400</sup> TNA FO 371/91317, Foreign Office to British Middle East Office (Cairo), Telegram No. 1109, 26 October 1951.

<sup>401</sup> TNA DEFE 5/8, Report of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, 'Peacetime Strategic Requirements in the Arab World,' 13 January 1948.



Displaying his proclivity towards the concept of noble savage, Glubb believed that the northern Arabs (or, as he refers to them, Mediterraneans) were too intellectual for enlistment. The central Arabian or desert Arab, in contrast, would make fine recruits for his force, Glubb thought. Kuwait in Glubb's mind would make an ideal recruiting ground for a battalion; indeed, several hundred men from the tribes in western Kuwait were already serving in the Arab Legion. If this proved impractical, Glubb suggested that Britain raise the Persian Gulf battalion of the Arab Army in Bahrain or Sharjah with the nucleus coming from the Arab Legion, similar then to the way the Trucial Oman Levies was formed.<sup>402</sup> Likening Bedouin fighters to Australians – in that they were proud, independent and sometimes unruly – Glubb concluded they would need natural leaders to follow. Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Nevil Brownjohn, judged it impractical to raise troops in Sinai and doubted the usefulness of more troops in the Aden Protectorate on top of the Levies there. He did think, though, that 'raising an Arab force in the Persian Gulf, with the primary role of defending and providing a stabilizing influence in the Persian Gulf oilfields, would have a definite strategic advantage.'<sup>403</sup> Britain's military chiefs gave both proposals – a RAF base at Kuwait with a detachment of troops and Glubb's Arab Army – their full consideration. Glubb joined the British defence chiefs on 10 October 1951 to discuss the relative merits of his Arab Army concept. No decision was made at this meeting on either proposal and the matter was passed on to the British Defence Coordination Committee, Middle East in Cairo for further discussion. This committee, meeting on 22 October 1951, veered towards Glubb's suggestion; stationing troops in Kuwait, they argued, was unsuitable on general political principles. In strikingly similar tones to the proposal for a Persian Gulf Levy force made by the Foreign Office in 1949, the Committee supported the idea of a Gulf-wide local force under British command:

Strategically, it would be desirable to have a military footing in the Persian Gulf area. A native force under British control stationed in the

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<sup>402</sup> TNA DEFE 11/66, Maj. Gen. Glubb, 'A Note on the Possibility of Raising an Arab Army,' 14 June 1951. Forwarded to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in a Minute by Lt-Gen. Sir Nevil Brownjohn, Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 'Possibility of Raising an Arab Army,' 13 September 1951.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, Lt. Gen. Sir Nevil Brownjohn (Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff), 'Possibility of Raising an Arab Army,' 13 September.

area in peace would form the nucleus for a defence organisation for the oilfields in war, and a foothold for operations elsewhere, e.g. against Persia [. . .] although Kuwait is potentially a good recruiting area, it is too close to Iraq to be a suitable war-time base for an Arab Army, and too far forward to assist in the defence of the Bahrain oil area.<sup>404</sup>

The Committee deferred making a final decision until after a first-hand appraisal had been made. They sent Brigadier J.A.E. Baird of the British Military Mission in Saudi Arabia to make an on-the-spot assessment and to garner the opinions of the Political Resident and his staff.<sup>405</sup> Baird's findings, endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff in a February 1952, rejected both ideas and instead argued that Britain's best policy was to improve the capabilities of local forces in the area.<sup>406</sup> Brigadier Baird's conclusions were seized upon. He was made the Political Resident's military adviser with one of his primary tasks was to advise and assist the local rulers in raising the standard of their existing forces. He was instructed to do this in ways that placed the fewest financial and manpower obligations on Britain.<sup>407</sup>

Even with a programme of improving the capabilities of local forces in the Gulf, British military planners in the Middle East remained wedded to view that flying in British troops from Iraq or the Canal Base Zone in Egypt would continue to be the surest way of protecting British interests in the region.<sup>408</sup> Yet there was a clear link between the effectiveness of local forces and these reinforcement plans by air: flying in British troops depended on airfields remaining in friendly hands.<sup>409</sup> Outside of the oil-producing protected states, the chief threat to British interests in the early 1950s came from Saudi territorial expansion.

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid, British Defence Coordination Committee Middle East (Cairo), 'Defence of Kuwait', 19 December 1951.

<sup>405</sup> TNA FO 371/91308, British Middle East Office (Cairo) to G.W. Furlonge, Foreign Office, 10 November 1951. Baird was a member of the Intelligence Staff of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army during the Western Desert campaigns of the Second World War. As a fluent Arabic speaker, he was head of the British Military Mission, training the Saudi Arabian National Guard in Taif for a number of years before his posting to Bahrain.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, Minutes of the Chiefs of Staff Meeting of 18 February 1952.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> TNA FO 371/104356, Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, 'Directive to Air Officer Commanding Iraq: Reinforcement of the Persian Gulf in the Event of Local Disorder,' 2 July 1952

<sup>409</sup> TNA FO 371/91308, Minutes of the Chiefs of Staff Meeting of 18 February 1952.

## 4.2 Strategies for Containing Saudi Arabia in Trucial Oman, 1951-55

Concern that Saudi Arabia would press its territorial claims in Trucial Oman – either by direct attack or by stirring up and supporting local opposition – was the main driver behind British efforts to expand the Trucial Oman Levies and the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces.

In the years following the Second World War the Sultan of Muscat placed little store by his military. Sir Rupert Hay told Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in July 1949 that he found the 'small number of men available for the defence of Muscat in the event of tribal attack [. . .] disquieting'.<sup>410</sup> Because the majority of the three hundred troops were committed to guard duties around Muscat, the force could only produce a few dozen men when ordered to parade.<sup>411</sup> One of the biggest obstacles to improving the Muscat Infantry was the Sultan's lack of faith in the force. This further diminished in September 1950 when 30 Baluchi men attacked the guardroom and released three of their comrades under detention.<sup>412</sup> Some 90 Baluchi soldiers from the Makran coast were dismissed and sent back to Pakistan on a steamer.<sup>413</sup> After the incident, Hay wrote again to the Bevin of his continued doubts of 'the amount of opposition they [the Muscat Infantry] would offer to a serious tribal attack on Muscat'.<sup>414</sup> In the short term, however, Saudi moves into Oman united the Sultan and Imamate and decreased the likelihood of an attack on Muscat.

At the end of April 1949, the Saudi Arabian government made a claim to a frontier that superseded its previous 1935 territorial demands. This new claim included much of the coastline of Abu Dhabi, the Liwa Oasis area and the

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<sup>410</sup> TNA FO 371/74988, Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 5 July 1949, enclosing report by Major T.P. Greenwood (Commandant, Muscat Infantry), 'Annual Report of the Muscat Infantry, 1948'.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> The Sultan's British Foreign Minister, Colonel Woods-Ballard, officiating for the Muscat Infantry's commander Major Campbell, tried to persuade the men to surrender the prisoners. His subsequent request that a British frigate be sent was rejected. TNA FO 371/82077, F.C.L. Chauncy (Political Agent, Muscat) to Sir Rupert Hay, 9 October 1950.

<sup>413</sup> This reduced the force from 276 all ranks to 176. FO 371/82077, Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 23 October 1950. See also Neil McLeod Innes, *Minister in Oman* (New York and Cambridge: Oleander Press, 1987), p. 28-9; Allen Rigsbee (2002), p. 7.

<sup>414</sup> FO 371/82077, Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 23 October 1950.

region around Al Ain and Buraimi, which was split between Oman and Abu Dhabi's control. When a force pursuing this claim on the Saudi's behalf took possession of the Omani village of Hamasa in the Buraimi oasis area on 31 August 1952 on the orders of the Saudi King, the Sultan had few options but to evoke the centuries-old practice of mustering loyal tribal fighters. The Sultan jointly raised with the Imam of Oman a general levy of approximately 8,000 tribal fighters, supported by the Muscat Infantry and its light artillery guns.<sup>415</sup> Rallying at Sohar on the Batinah coast, the assembled force was stopped by Britain, which pressured the Sultan to delay military action in favour of British-led negotiations. Though the expedition was called off, the Sultan wanted to impress the assembled tribal levies with a display of the Muscat Infantry's artillery guns. The artillery could not be fired; a key working part for the guns had been left in Muscat. Infuriated by the incompetence displayed at Sohar, the Sultan's poor impression of the Muscat Infantry stiffened.

On this occasion, Sultan Said was able to assemble a tribal force, but a shift in tribal dynamics could just as easily render this unworkable. The threat from Saudi Arabia made it all the more important that the Sultan had a military force entirely at his disposal and not reliant on the vagaries of tribal alliances. To this end, the Sultan established the Batinah Force soon after the Saudi move into Buraimi. Recruits were drawn largely from the Hawasinah, an Arab tribe who lived in the foothills behind Sohar. Command of the new unit fell to a British contract officer, Colin Maxwell, a veteran of the Second World War and of the Palestine Police.<sup>416</sup> Fellow Briton St John Armitage, formerly a military adviser with the British Military Mission to Saudi Arabia, soon joined as Maxwell's second in command. The Batinah Force was set up to operate along the north-eastern coastal strip, but by April 1953 it had only recruited 30 men.<sup>417</sup> Unlike the Muscat Infantry, which was under administrative control of the Sultan's Foreign Ministry, the Batinah Force's British officers reported to Sultan Said and, in his absence, to his close relative Sayyid Shehab.<sup>418</sup> Being

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<sup>415</sup> Innes (1987), p. 22.

<sup>416</sup> When he first arrived at Sohar in 1952 in the middle of the Buraimi crisis, the Sultan greeted him with the words: 'Will you march with us to Buraimi?' Innes (1987), p. 37.

<sup>417</sup> TNA FO 371/104407, Sir Rupert Hay to Foreign Office, 14 April 1953.

<sup>418</sup> Shehab was also in charge of the Muscat and Mutrah police, which were commanded by a former Muscat Infantry Jemadar and headquartered in the great

comprised of mainly Arab tribesmen, the Batinah Force was more akin to a traditional tribal levy force.<sup>419</sup> In contrast, because the Muscat Infantry continued to recruit much of its soldiery from the Sultan's Gwador enclave on the Makran Coast, it sat more naturally within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' orbit.

Since 1948, the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs had been filled by British nationals (initially Mr Woods-Ballard until he was replaced by Neil McLeod Innes in October 1953). Under Woods-Ballard and Innes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for running, alongside the Muscat Infantry, the municipality for Muscat and Muttrah, the school and the Sultan's Gwador possession on the Makran Coast.<sup>420</sup> Although these were privately employed individuals, the British Foreign Office had put them forward as candidates, ensuring a measure of British influence.<sup>421</sup> Like his foreign ministers, the Sultan favoured employing Britons as contract officers for his military. In late 1953, the Muscat Infantry commander resigned under a dark cloud. Although the Pakistani Subhedar-Major, Aziz al-Rahman, who was left in temporary charge was, according to the Oman's British Foreign Minister, a 'splendid man' who 'had been bred in the best tradition of the old Indian Army; probably the best leader the force had known for some time, being utterly loyal, trustworthy, straightforward and a tiger for action,' the Sultan soon replaced him with a British contract officer.<sup>422</sup>

Whilst Britain had dissuaded Sultan Said from sending his makeshift force from marching on Buraimi and favoured a diplomatic solution, it nevertheless held the belief that a credible military was needed at Buraimi if Saudi Arabia was to take the negotiations seriously. Rather than permanently deploy its own forces, Britain hoped to make use of the TOL in this instance and moved part of the force into positions around Buraimi in 1952. The TOL was joined at certain moments of tension by British ground-attack aircraft and RAF Regiment

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fortress of Merani built by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. He also ran the prison at Jelali which was the twin fort at the other end of Muscat harbour. A further difference was that the Muscat Infantry were trained in Urdu and the Batinah Force in Arabic. This made it all the more difficult in later years when the forces were consolidated under one command. The Minister of Interior was concerned with tribal irregulars garrisoning the Walis' forts and town gates.

<sup>419</sup> Innes (1987), pp. 24-6, 29, 36, 51, and 56-7.

<sup>420</sup> Allen Rigsbee (2002), pp. 6-7. See also Innes (1987), pp. 32 and 75.

<sup>421</sup> Innes (1987), pp. 18-20.

<sup>422</sup> Pat Waterfield, a former artillery officer who had served in the Desert Campaign during the Second World War took over the force. Ibid, pp. 26-7.

armoured car squadrons stationed in Sharjah. By the end of 1952, the Levies were only 80-strong and severely overstretched due to this new commitment. More local tribesmen were recruited, especially from Abu Dhabi, and plans were under way to increase the size of the force. Owing to continued difficulties in finding medically fit men from the local tribes, Britain initially reinforced the Levies with detachments of Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) and several more British officers.<sup>423</sup> In order to rapidly expand the force, Britain recruited men from Aden for the force. One of the TOL squadrons made up entirely of men from Aden mutinied in late 1953, killing their British squadron commander, a British medical officer and an Arab sergeant major.<sup>424</sup> When the relief force arrived the following morning, all the levymen from the squadron except the three murderers, who had fled, were at their posts and were disarmed.<sup>425</sup>

The mutiny undermined confidence in London about the strategy of relying on the TOL to secure British interests in the Trucial States. When Anthony Eden was still the British Foreign Secretary he told the Chiefs of Staff that because he attached the highest importance to the Gulf he wanted a small British force of either one or two companies permanently stationed in the area. Senior Foreign Office official, L.A.C. Fry, relayed Eden's thinking to the Residency in December 1954:

The Royal Navy and the Trucial Oman Levies are at present enough for all normal security purposes in the Gulf (the Treasury, by the way, are urging us to reduce the size of the Levies, a proposition to which I need say our reaction was firm). The problem, as I see it, is not one of having more Arabs under arms in the Gulf area, a possibility that was recently considered and might be suggested again [here Fry was most likely referring to Major-General John Glubb's 1951 proposal for an Arab Army]. The problem is that of providing against an emergency, and most if not all foreseeable emergencies would call for British troops. It would be their reliability and impartiality that we should need. That, I feel sure, is what the Secretary of State [Anthony Eden] had in mind when he said that he would prefer to have a small British force actually stationed in the area.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Mann (1994), p. 35.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>425</sup> TNA FO 1016/239, Bernard Burrows (Political Resident) to Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary), 23 November 1953.

<sup>426</sup> TNA FO 371/109881, L.A.C. Fry (Foreign Office) to Bernard Burrows, 11 December 1954. In Fry's personal opinion, Oman's Dhofar province would be the best place to base British troops because of its climate.

The disbandment of the Adeni squadron meant that the TOL was severely under strength. To fill the gap, Britain implemented its Persian Gulf reinforcement plan. For the second time in as many years, an RAF Regiment detachment was sent to Sharjah from Iraq. Whilst the British defence chiefs were content to help the TOL get back on its feet, they were adamant that the RAF Regiment should leave Sharjah – the base, crucially, was without air-conditioned barracks – and return to Iraq before the end of March 1954 at the very latest. The dispersion of small detachments to remote parts of the world, they argued, was grossly uneconomical and contrary to the principle of ‘flexibility of force’ – a leading doctrine in British military circles in the 1950s. Though Eden wanted the option of stationing British troops in the Gulf considered, Britain’s defence establishment was against the idea of scattering small units around the globe. They believed that an expanded and more reliable local force in the Trucial States was the better option.

After the mutiny the decision was taken to make the TOL into a truly local force. Ninety Adenis of C Squadron were discharged, leaving the TOL nearly a full squadron under strength.<sup>427</sup> This suited the TOL commander, Lt-Col. W.J. Martin, who had earlier complained about the high proportion of ‘unsatisfactory characters’ that had arrived in the second tranche from Aden and who made up the majority of levymen of the mutinying squadron.<sup>428</sup> The plan was to expand the TOL from 100 to 500 men with the focus on local recruits. By the end of 1954, this had been achieved.<sup>429</sup> This sudden influx of local men posed a huge challenge for the British officers and NCOs seconded to command and train the force. As one former TOL officer recalls: ‘Unlike any other force under British Army tutelage, the TOL was unique in that there was no comparable local military tradition to build on and everything had to be taught, and learnt, from the absolute beginning.’<sup>430</sup> The Saudi incursion into Buraimi changed the shape and role of the TOL. Britain had raised it as a form of local gendarmerie; the TOL were now being asked to act as a regular armed

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<sup>427</sup> Only 12 men of C Squadron known to be trustworthy were retained. Mann (1994), pp. 41-2.

<sup>428</sup> TNA FO 1016/239, Bernard Burrows to Anthony Eden, 23 November 1953.

<sup>429</sup> The force at the end of the year was 539-strong. Mann (1994), p. 48.

<sup>430</sup> Clayton (1999), pp. 46-7. For similar comments from a former TOL officer, see P.S Allfree, *Warlords of Oman* (London: Robert Hale, 1967), p. 22. Allfree joined the Levies in 1953. Mann (1994), p. 45; and Lt-Col. W.J. Martin, ‘Just a British Soldier’, Imperial War Museum, IWM 84/59/1.

unit.<sup>431</sup> Signposting future changes, the Foreign Office handed over the administration of the TOL to Middle East Land Forces at the beginning January 1954. This meant that the commander of the Levies, himself a regular British officer, was responsible to the SAOPG in Bahrain who in turn answered to Middle East Land Forces. In reality, the TOL acted ultimately on the direction of the Political Resident whose authority was normally exercised by the Political Agent, Trucial States.

If the mutiny in 1953 had raised a question mark about the reliability of the force in London, this was largely answered over the course of 1955. On the night 12/13 May the Levies, supported by two Royal Navy frigates, moved from Sharjah to Dubai to support the Ruler who was facing a challenge to his authority from his pro-Saudi uncle and his followers. Seemingly overawed by the presence of Levies in full battle dress manning checkpoints around the uncle's stronghold in Deira (on the eastern bank of the creek), the recalcitrant members of the ruler's family had little choice but to accept exile.<sup>432</sup> Then after arbitration talks on Buraimi broke down, Britain ordered the TOL to evict the Saudis by force.<sup>433</sup> Two separate parties of Levies arrived in Buraimi just before dawn on 26 October 1955 supported by two RAF Lincoln planes from Bomber Command in Britain, as well as other aircraft already flown in from Aden and Bahrain. One menacing Lincoln flew low over the Saudis to encourage their surrender; the second carried out a reconnaissance of the western approaches to Buraimi in case of Saudi retaliation. None came; but as a precaution, Britain flew an infantry company of the King's Royal Rifles Corps (KRRC) into Sharjah. When it came to the question of removing the KRRC from Sharjah, Anthony Eden, now the British Prime Minister, displayed less faith in local forces in the Gulf than his predecessor Winston Churchill who had supported the build-up of the TOL and the Sultan's forces to counter Saudi hostility. Chief Staff Officer at the Ministry of Defence, Nevil Brownjohn, told Middle East Land Forces in November 1955 that Prime Minister Eden was 'extremely sensitive about the Persian Gulf' and remembered the TOL 1953 mutiny. Moreover, according to General Brownjohn, Eden had,

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<sup>431</sup> Mann (1994), p. 37.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, pp. 54-55.

<sup>433</sup> For a detailed account of the TOL's operation in Buraimi see: Clayton (1999), pp. 71-8



[. . .] little confidence in the local forces and is not disposed to give them credit for recent operations [. . .] The Prime Minister does not I think fully appreciate the undesirability of permanently stationing British troops in the Persian Gulf area, and is attracted to the idea of retaining the British company at Sharjah on a rotating basis, at any rate for the time being.<sup>434</sup>

Eden's thinking was out of step with British military planners in the Middle East who viewed the TOL's action in Buraimi as a vindication of its policy of using local forces where possible. Britain had elected to use the TOL in Buraimi to evict the Saudi forces rather than its own troops partly because Saudi Arabia had recently signed a defence pact with Egypt. The use of regular British troops was thus bound up with wider diplomatic sensitivities whilst the TOL provided a veneer of legitimacy because they were a local force.

Even before the Buraimi operation, British defence officials recognised that the force would need to be re-equipped and expanded if it was to be used in a war-like role again. In the days before the levies advanced on Saudi forces, the General Headquarters of the Middle East Land Forces recommended to the Ministry of Defence that Britain should double the TOL's strength by: (a) adding a fifth rifle squadron; (b) increasing each squadron from 94 to 150 men; and (c) by adding a training wing and a mortar platoon. This would, British military planners hoped, put the TOL in a position to relieve British Middle East Land Forces of most of its commitments across the whole Persian Gulf during peacetime and 'would undoubtedly be of great value to us in war in helping to maintain order there.'<sup>435</sup> The scheme required more funds and the difficult task of finding additional British officers and trainers. '[O]wing to the particularly unattractive conditions under which they [British military personnel] serve when compared with those of other colonial forces,' British senior military officers recognised that recruitment would be a challenge.<sup>436</sup>

The Ministry of Defence endorsed the proposal for expansion, but made it clear that the TOL was a force for security of both the Trucial States and northern Oman; any reference made of the Levies having a wider Gulf role, they

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<sup>434</sup> TNA DEFE 11/109, Nevil Brownjohn (Chief Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence) to Keightley (G.H.Q. Middle East Land Forces), 10 November 1955.

<sup>435</sup> FO 371/114680, GHQ Middle East Land Forces to MOD, 'Trucial Oman Levies,' 24 October 1955.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

stated, must be extricated.<sup>437</sup> Although the idea to widen the TOL's role to the entire Gulf was buried for a second time it had, as an organisation, nonetheless morphed irreversibly from its original concept. What Britain had first conceived as a small anti-slavery and escort unit was now being touted as an asset for use in counter-insurgency operations in the Omani interior and for resisting organised armed attacks from Saudi forces on Abu Dhabi. In line with the TOL's expanded role, the War Office agreed in 10 November 1955 that the Levies should be re-styled as Scouts (the official name change came in March 1956). The Levies gained additional logistical support in the shape of access to four RAF Pembroke light transport planes based at Sharjah which allowed the TOL to operate more closely with the Sultan's forces in the Omani interior. These Pembrokes could land small bodies of troops (they could carry eight men) on makeshift airstrips in hilly country.<sup>438</sup>

The Political Resident was anxious that Whitehall had not yet formerly approved the recommendations for doubling the size of the force. Who funded the force became a contentious issue. Foreign Office officials argued that as the Levies were now responsible for defending the frontiers and for protecting oil interests they were fulfilling an 'Imperial commitment'. Therefore, the War Office should contribute to the upkeep of the force as well as the Foreign Office.<sup>439</sup> The Treasury rejected this thinking. 'The curbing of Saudi Arabian infiltration is not Imperial Defence [. . .] it is clear that the Levies meet no worthwhile military mobilisation requirement – certainly not one that we should consider paying for,' one senior Treasury official representing the views of the War Office lashed back in December 1955. The view of the Treasury was thus unchanged: the Foreign Office should remain financially responsible for the Levies.<sup>440</sup>

Without the money to increase numbers, however, the TOL would be unable to establish a post near the Liwa Oasis in western Abu Dhabi to check Saudi infiltration and to provide adequate protection for oil exploration. Much to

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> TNA AIR 20/9469, Headquarters Middle East Air Force (Main-Cyprus) to Air Ministry, 30 December 1955.

<sup>439</sup> TNA FO 371/114680, H. W. Minshull (Foreign Office) to A.D. Peck (Treasury), 23 November 1955.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, D.R J. Stephens (Treasury) to A. D. Peck (Treasury), 2 December 1955. Letter is copied to Minshull in the Foreign Office.

the relief of the Political Resident, financing from the Treasury was authorised in February 1956. In that same month, levymen hailing from the Liwa Oasis area of Abu Dhabi left their posts in Sharjah *en masse* without warning. This display of unreliability gave cause for Whitehall officials to think again as to whether Britain should station a unit of its own regular troops in the Trucial States. In an attempt to put the actions of the Abu Dhabi recruits in context, the Political Resident wrote to London that:

It should be borne in mind in assessing the incident that the Force [TOL] is still only a very few years old and that the men joining it have absolutely no military tradition or experience and, to begin with in some cases at any rate, are inclined to join simply as they would join an oil company, in order to make some money, and they have little more compunction in leaving if the conditions do not appeal to them than they would in leaving a commercial organisation. Everyone is fully aware of the need to build up a regimental tradition and I am sure that this will gradually take place.<sup>441</sup>

Though Britain could be surer about the loyalty of its own troops, maintaining a regular battalion in the area was expensive and inefficient. The Political Resident did not think there was need for a British unit permanently stationed in Sharjah. However, a company flying in for a couple of weeks now and again for training and showing the flag, he suggested, would be very welcome.<sup>442</sup>

The name change in March 1956 to the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) was partly to debunk the impression it was a unit of conscripts – the term *levy* implied forced recruitment.<sup>443</sup> After the TOL became the TOS, the Foreign Office kept up its efforts to get the War Office to share the costs of the force. The War Office, however, remained obdurate. When the Treasury in August 1956 finally came around to the cogency of the Foreign Office's position, the War Office had little choice but to ungraciously agree to pay half the costs of the Scouts.<sup>444</sup> In spite of its reluctance of the War Office to part finance the force, the TOS worked hand in hand with the British military in the area. RAF planes kept up a steady vigil over the disputed border area in western Abu Dhabi and the TOS established new outposts to respond more effectively to any

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<sup>441</sup> TNA AIR 20/9470, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 6 February 1956.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> Mann (1994), p. 62.

<sup>444</sup> TNA FO 371/120627, Minute by H.W. Minshull (Foreign Office), 'Financial Responsibility for the Trucial Oman Scouts,' 14 September 1956.

incursion.<sup>445</sup> If required, Venom ground-attack aircraft from their bases in Aden could be called in. One former TOS officer explains how this cooperation would have worked in practice:

[TOS] ground patrols would locate and shadow any incursion and call for air strikes from Bahrain. Should the Lincoln [aircraft] be in the area, or have spotted the incursion, it would take over the task of airborne strike control for the Venom ground-attack sorties. A succession of RAF pilots from the Venom Squadron based in Aden were attached to Clayton Force [as the makeshift TOS force in the area became known] as Air Liaison Officers (ALOs) to talk the aircraft on to their targets.<sup>446</sup>

The Saudi threat to the western approaches of Abu Dhabi and meddling in the internal affairs of Oman would continue into the 1960s. The decision to use of TOL at Buraimi rather than British troops was based on the calculation that the latter would be more controversial. The Anglo-French military misadventure in Egypt in October-November 1956 left Britain in little doubt about the international sensitivities that existed in using armed forces in the Arab World. The Suez debacle served to further excite Arab nationalist sentiment that had been on the rise since Gamal Abdul Nasser seized power in Egypt and used all the tools of the state to propagate his message.<sup>447</sup>

### **4.3 Unrest in Bahrain and Qatar, 1954-1957: Direct Intervention or Local Coercion?**

Seeing rising Arab nationalist sentiment in Egypt and the Levant spreading to the Gulf, Prime Minister Anthony Eden considered in early 1956 despatching British troops to Bahrain and to Kuwait to demonstrate Britain's resolve.<sup>448</sup> The Resident, Sir Bernard Burrows, however, strongly opposed using British military forces to quell what were, for him at least, political issues. He felt that even visitations by British troops created more trouble than any benefit gained

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<sup>445</sup> David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East* (London: HMSO, 1980), p. 124-5.

<sup>446</sup> Clayton (1999), p. 82. Venoms were later stationed in the Gulf to provide a ground-attack aircraft asset to counter a Saudi incursion.

<sup>447</sup> Nigel J. Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996).

<sup>448</sup> TNA FO 371/20617, Foreign Office Minute, C.A.E. Shuckburgh (Eastern Department), 6 March 1956.

because they reminded local inhabitants, and especially those with Arab nationalist sympathies, of Britain's overt military control. Moreover, these short visits could encourage Egyptian propaganda against British military imperialism. There was also the reaction of the rulers to consider. Whilst Shaikh Salman Al Khalifah of Bahrain (r. 1942-61) would welcome visits by British troops, it could engender in him the belief that Britain would back him in all circumstances, and therefore make him less likely to carry out political reforms. In Kuwait, Burrows thought the amir would reject proposals for visits by British troops outright, as they would be an affront to his independence. Moreover, the presence of British soldiers would make it more difficult for him to maintain his links with Britain in face of hostile criticism from inside and outside his *majlis* (ruler's court in Arabic). The Ruler of Qatar would welcome evidence of British support for him for internal purposes, Burrows surmised, but would be nervous of Saudi Arabia's reaction to troop visits. Far better, Burrows concluded, to intensify naval visits – especially by a larger cruiser – instead sending troops. These were a well-known, traditional feature of Britain's position; and because they rarely attracted little or no hostile comment, the rulers generally appreciated them.<sup>449</sup>

The view that overt displays of British military power brought more problems than they could ever help to quell began to crystallize in the mid-1950s onwards in the minds of British officials. The preference for naval power in the Gulf extended to situations that required direct action. Burrows still pressed for additional frigates assigned to the Gulf as, in his opinion, 'naval landing parties are always going to be earliest available internal security reinforcements.'<sup>450</sup> Nonetheless, in terms of an actual military intervention in an emergency, Burrows warned the Foreign Office that this 'would no doubt [. . .] become a major target for Egyptian propaganda.'<sup>451</sup> Such a test was developing in Bahrain.

In Bahrain, latent tensions exploded in protests, violence and riots between 1953 and 1954.<sup>452</sup> A general strike in December 1954 by both Sunni

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<sup>449</sup> TNA AIR 20/9894, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 9 March 1956.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Willard A. Beling, 'Recent Developments in Labor Relations in Bahrain', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 13, No.2 (Spring, 1959), p. 156. For a discussion of the social and political tensions in Bahrain in the 1950s, see 'The Nationalist Movements of the

and Shia Bahrainis showed that the disorder was more than the usual inter-sectarian discord.<sup>453</sup> Alongside labour unrest, people attacked the judicial system for its unfairness and the State Police for not employing enough Bahrainis.<sup>454</sup> Britain saw a strong police force as the only means of avoiding an intervention with its own troops. New agreements with BAPCO in December 1952 doubled Bahrain's revenues, making more money available to spend on the State Police.<sup>455</sup> Sitting as a judge in the court and taking a very public role as Police Commandant, the *Mustashar* became the symbol — and a foreign one at that — of the coercive arm of the state. Animosity between Belgrave and British officials, who believed the British adviser's very public profile was destabilising to Bahrain, deepened during this period. According to the Political Resident, Sir Rupert Hay, the problem centred 'round the personality and position occupied by Mr Belgrave the Financial Adviser', who was also Commandant of the Bahrain State Police. Back in 1949, Hay explained to the then-Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, how it came to pass that a Briton wielded such power in Bahrain.

Shaikh Hamad who ruled Bahrain as Regent or Shaikh from 1923 until 1942 took little interest in the affairs of the State and left practically everything to Mr Belgrave after his appointment. As a result he became to all intents and purposes the Ruler of the State, and he still holds this position in the eyes of the public although the present Shaikh takes an active an effective interest in State affairs.<sup>456</sup>

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1950's,' Chapter 3 of Fred H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989).

<sup>453</sup> The opposition movement was led by a small central steering group calling itself the Higher Executive Committee composed of four Sunnis and four Shia. Beling (1959), p. 157.

<sup>454</sup> Louay Bahry, 'The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?' *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 1997), p. 51. For many years, service in the State Police was a popular profession for Bahrainis, but the oil industry began to attract many youths who might have previously sought employment in the force. The past gains of filling police posts with Bahrainis came undone; Arabs mainly from Oman and Yemen now constituted the majority of the new recruits.

<sup>455</sup> For an account of Bahrain during Shaikh Salman's rule, see Andrew Wheatcroft, *Life and Times of Shaikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, Ruler of Bahrain 1942-1961* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995).

<sup>456</sup> TNA FO 371/68319, Sir Rupert Hay to Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary), 17 April 1949.

Belgrave deeply resented any suggestion that a separate officer be appointed in his place.<sup>457</sup> Burrows, Hay's successor as Political Resident, thought it was impractical that Belgrave should command the State Police alongside his other executive duties. In time, Britain would work for the removal of *al-Mustashar*, but in October 1953 the Political Resident sat down to discuss with Belgrave various ways that the British and Bahraini governments could improve the State Police.<sup>458</sup> When trouble flared up at the end of 1954, British officials were quick to complain that Belgrave had not built up the force to enable it to keep order. In fact, the police had changed very little since the 1930s, except that Bahrain had replaced the camel-mounted section – a unit that in Belgrave's words had become a 'picturesque but expensive survival' – with car patrols.<sup>459</sup> Burrows claims in his memoirs that he persuaded Belgrave to relinquish the day-to-day running of the force and to make much-needed improvements to its size and structure.<sup>460</sup> It is not clear whether Belgrave acted directly in response to Burrows' appeals. What is known, however, is that by 1955 the Bahrain State Police had increased the number of British officers in the force, including the appointment of Colonel St John Hammersley, a former Governor of Sinai in the Egyptian service, as Assistant Commandant. Bahrain enlarged the force to over 400 men, and, in an act that appeared to presage coming trouble, equipped police with steel helmets.<sup>461</sup> The improvements to the State Police had only just begun before the disturbances became more serious.<sup>462</sup>

On 2 March 1956, the motorcade of British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, who was visiting Bahrain en route to India, was caught in a crowd leaving a football match as it crossed the causeway between Muharraq and Manama. Rocks were thrown as the vehicles forced their way through. The day had not begun well for British interests in the Middle East. The radio was awash with

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<sup>457</sup> TNA FO 371/91264, Sir Rupert Hay to the Foreign Secretary, 20 April 1951.

<sup>458</sup> TNA FO 371/104263, Bernard Burrows to Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary), 13 October 1953.

<sup>459</sup> AWDU, 'Annual Report for year 1372 (Oct 1952-Sep 1953),' Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1970: Volume V 1952-1956.

<sup>460</sup> Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand: The Gulf in Transition, 1953-1958* (Salisbury, UK: Michael Russell, 1990), p. 63.

<sup>461</sup> AWDU, 'Annual Report for year 1372 (Oct 1952-Sep 1953),' *Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1970: Volume V 1952-1956*; and Sir Bernard Burrows, *Diplomat in a Changing World* (County Durham, UK: The Memoir Club, 2001), p.74-5.

<sup>462</sup> Willard A. Beling (1959), p. 157; and Burrows (1990), p. 64.

news that John Bagot Glubb, the long-time and high-profile British commander of the Jordanian Arab Legion, had been dismissed.<sup>463</sup> For many activists in Manama and Muharraq, Belgrave was Bahrain's Glubb; and, as in Jordan, they wanted rid of him. The Foreign Secretary was temporarily unable to return to the airport after dinner with the Ruler because protestors still blocked the causeway. A Royal Navy frigate sent ashore a landing party, but the State Police's riot squad had already cleared the route.<sup>464</sup> 'I do not like to think,' the Political Resident wrote in his memoirs, 'what might have happened if the police had not received this strengthening during the past three years.'<sup>465</sup>

It was not quite the time for triumphalism. Bahrain, especially Manama, remained in a state of high tension. An argument in a Manama vegetable market on 11 March 1956 led to deadly clashes between rioters and police.<sup>466</sup> By the afternoon, 100 police were trying to contain an angry crowd numbering somewhere between 400 and 500. Wearing their newly purchased steel helmets, the police initially tried to calm the crowd, which responded by pelting the police with fish and potatoes. There are conflicting accounts of what happened next, but upon hearing what sounded like a small explosion, the police started firing from the hip into the air. The crowd scattered; the shooting stopped; several protestors lay dead.<sup>467</sup> As an emergency meeting of the LDC (PG) sat at the Residency, news arrived that the Bahrain State Police had opened fire on demonstrators.<sup>468</sup> The SNOGP, Captain Wight-Boycott, reported that he already landed one platoon of men from HMS *Loch Alvie* and that a

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<sup>463</sup> This is Charles Belgrave's recollection. He believed that Glubb's dismissal was hotly debated around the market. Belgrave (1960), p. 218.

<sup>464</sup> TNA FO 371/120545 'Disturbance in Bahrain', Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf, Capt. Wight-Boycott, Bahrain to Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, 6 March, 1956; and Burrows (1990), pp. 64-5.

<sup>465</sup> Sir Bernard Burrows, *Diplomat in a Changing World* (County Durham, UK: The Memoir Club, 2001), p. 76-7.

<sup>466</sup> Belgrave (1960), p. 221-2.

<sup>467</sup> A board of inquiry concluded that the police's response was 'grossly excessive' (85 policemen on that day fired 478 rounds); that no one was in overall command at the scene (neither Belgrave, nor Hammersely nor Shaikh Khalifah was there); and that the police detachments sent to deal with the riots were hastily formed and ill trained.

<sup>468</sup> The firing continued for some minutes 'despite the fact that the senior police on the spot [Capt. Hills, Inspector Wilson and Inspector Khalifah Majrin] were shouting and whistling to their men to cease fire.' Further ill-discipline was shown when some of the police continued to fire out their vehicles long after they had left the Square. TNA FO 371/120547, 'Report of Board of Inquiry into Disturbances in Bahrain, 2-16 March 1956', undated May 1956. Board comprised of Peace (Judicial Adviser to the Government of Bahrain) and Lawdsley (Assistant Judge for H.M.'s Court for Bahrain).



second platoon would be landing within half an hour. Exercising its delegated authority, the LDC (PG) decided to airlift in a British Army infantry company (the King's Royal Rifle Corps) from Sharjah.<sup>469</sup> The Committee based this decision on the fear that a general strike called for the following morning might turn violent and they had little faith that the State Police could keep order. Shaikh Salman, whom the LDC (PG) did not consult, reacted unfavourably to the arrival of British troops. In view of the security challenges facing him, he did not protest too loudly, but wanted assurances that the presence of British troops was but a temporary expedient.<sup>470</sup> With a full infantry company in Bahrain, the SAOPG, Brigadier Baird, believed that no further reinforcements were necessary, but Britain should make preparations should the situation deteriorate.<sup>471</sup>

Despite deploying two companies of infantry to Bahrain, the Political Resident did not want British troops used against protestors.<sup>472</sup> They were there, in his mind, for moral support only. The Foreign Office took a different line and wanted Shaikh Salman to 'feel confident that we stand behind him and would of course send in British troops to assist in restoring order if there were a breakdown.'<sup>473</sup> Continuing in this spirit, the Foreign Office wanted the LDC (PG) to consider whether it was possible to send the TOS to Bahrain, Qatar or Kuwait to help quell any outbreaks of disorder. Committee members were united in the view that the Scouts should not be used as first-line troops in any disturbance outside the Trucial States.<sup>474</sup>

When violence again threatened to boil over in Bahrain in May 1956, British officials feared that its troops would be dragged into an intractable internal conflict. Such a development would leave the country open to the

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<sup>469</sup> TNA FO 371/120621, Minutes of 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of LDC (PG), 11 March 1956; and TNA FO 371/120617, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 11 March 1956.

<sup>470</sup> TNA FO 371/120544 Bahrain to Foreign Office, 12 March 1956; TNA FO 371/120621, Minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of LDC (PG), 13 March 1956. See also: Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifah* (Routledge, 1995).

<sup>471</sup> Before day broke on 12 March a second frigate, *HMS Loch Lomond*, was moved to Sitra jetty to protect the refinery and other oil company installations. The East Indies Station cruiser *HMS Superb*, with its compliment of 75 Royal Marines, began steaming towards Bahrain, but was still over a week away. Moreover, a company of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) was brought to twelve hours' notice at Aden and the other company of KRRC at Derna (Cyrenaica, Libya) had been alerted.

<sup>472</sup> TNA FO 371/120544, Residency (Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 4 March 1956.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, Foreign Office to Residency (Bahrain), 6 March 1956.

<sup>474</sup> TNA FO 371/120621, Minutes of 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of LDC (PG) held on 8 March 1956.

acquisition that, in the Gulf, Britain was little more than a reactionary colonial power that suppressed the legitimate aspirations of downtrodden people. With stirrings of possible fresh outbreaks of violence at the end of Ramadan in May, Hammersley feared that if his police were asked to act they would again use firearms out of nervousness. He therefore wanted to know if the British government would be prepared to back the police with its troops for at least a year while he was building up his force and training it to act without shooting first. The SAOPG, Brigadier Baird, was not sure what assistance Hammersley was asking for. It was not practicable in his mind for British troops to take over police duties.<sup>475</sup> The Resident, Sir Bernard Burrows, warned the Foreign Office that Britain's standing would be damaged if British troops were used to 'help put down a political movement which had remained almost entirely within the bounds of law.' A more sagacious policy, Burrows again insisted, was to assist Bahrain in strengthening the State Police so that it could deal with any disorder that might arise.<sup>476</sup> To this end, Brigadier Baird proposed that Bahrain employ a further cadre of British police officers; that the number of policemen be increased; and that if suitable Bahrainis could not be recruited fast enough to fill the new positions, which had been a problem in the past, then Britain should help Bahrain recruit trained Iraqis who could form the backbone of this enlarged force.<sup>477</sup> The Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, gave his support to these recommendations and, in a memorandum to the Cabinet in April 1956, made note of the weakness of the Bahrain Police and the difficulty in strengthening them. 'The reformists strongly oppose the introduction of reinforcements from Iraq but I hope that by bringing in small numbers of Iraqis unobtrusively and increasing the number of British police officers, we shall be able to build up the Bahrain Police to the point where they are adequate to control any outbreaks,' he told his Cabinet colleagues.<sup>478</sup>

Improving the efficacy of the State Police was not the only means by which British officials felt Bahrain could improve the security situation. Burrows believed Belgrave was a source of discontent amongst a large section of the

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<sup>475</sup> TNA FO 371/120621, Minutes of 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of LDC (PG), 30 April 1956.

<sup>476</sup> TNA FO 371/120544, Residency (Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 4 March 1956.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid*, Residency (Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 4 March 1956.

<sup>478</sup> TNA CAB 129/80, 'Bahrain', Memorandum by Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 14 April 1956.

Bahraini population and wanted the Shaikh Salman to retire him.<sup>479</sup> The sheer strength of feeling against Belgrave impressed Burrows, believing that 'some early news of plans for his replacement would do more than anything to stabilize the situation.'<sup>480</sup> The Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, also wanted *al-Mustashar* gone:

The future of Sir Charles Belgrave is of great importance in all this. He is still the focus for hostility against the Bahrain Government and indirectly against Her Majesty's Government. Feeling against him is widespread and shared by many responsible citizens in Bahrain. He has also lost the confidence of the majority of his British officials and is regarded as a liability by people in London with interests in the Gulf.<sup>481</sup>

Selwyn Lloyd proposed to the Cabinet that Britain dictate the timing of Belgrave's retirement 'and take immediate measures to ensure the retention of an Englishman in a key position with the Ruler and the Government of Bahrain.'<sup>482</sup> By early May, the Political Resident was in receipt of direct instructions from the Foreign Office to begin preparing the way for Belgrave's retirement. The Ruler was furious with the British Government for listening to the opposition's demands on the subject of removing Belgrave, and did not waver in his support for his adviser. In a fiery letter to the Foreign Secretary, he asked sardonically whether Britain actually wished for the opposition to seize authority from him. Was this the thanks that he deserved for his friendship with Britain, he asked?<sup>483</sup> Castigating Britain for accepting without hesitation his opponent's complaints about Belgrave, the Ruler wrote that: 'The position of our Adviser differs from that of General Glubb and it is not our intention to dispense with his services.'<sup>484</sup> By way of palliation, Selwyn Lloyd tried to explain why the British government was mediating with the opposition. Bahrain's best policy, Lloyd advised, was to guide the opposition leaders 'into channels of

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<sup>479</sup> TNA FO 371/120621, Minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of LDC (PG), 8 May 1956.

<sup>480</sup> TNA AIR 20/9894, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 3 May 1956.

<sup>481</sup> TNA CAB 129/80, Memorandum by Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary) 'Bahrain', 14 April 1956.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> TNA FO 371/120548, Letter (Translation) from Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah (ruler of Bahrain) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), protesting at British interference in Bahraini internal affairs, 13 July 1956.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

reasonableness and cooperation with the government, rather than to attempt repression.’ This, as Lloyd stated, was a short term expedient until Bahrain was in possession of the means to keep down the opposition by coercion.

Your Highness’s police have been regrettably unable to prevent hostile political demonstrations; nor are they at present strong enough to preserve public security in all eventualities. Until therefore there has been time for the reorganisation and training of the Police, Her Majesty’s representatives have thought it essential in Your Highness’s own interests to advise that your Government should avoid doing anything to provoke such opposition as might endanger the security of the people of Bahrain.<sup>485</sup>

The British adviser, who been so instrumental in forming and running the State Police, was now forced to retire but only after he saw the leaders of the opposition sentenced to long prison terms and banished to the island of St. Helena.

In Qatar, the reluctance of the Ruler, Shaikh Ali Al Thani, to use his armed police to maintain order was no surprise to British officials. Whenever the Ruler felt threatened, he simply ordered the distribution of rifles from the state armoury to his loyal Bedouin. It was not simply a matter of Shaikh Ali holding little confidence in his police – he actively hindered their work. British representatives in the Gulf believed that Shaikh Ali withheld support to the police whenever they tried to confront labour violence or attempted to arrest tribesmen accused of stealing oil company equipment. This problem reached its nadir earlier in August 1955 when a serious strike broke out at Umm Said port. In what the Political Agent in Qatar described as ‘the one serious breakdown of the government machine’ that year, the Ruler made it clear to police that they should not to get involved because he favoured the Qatari rioters over the non-Qatari police.<sup>486</sup> Officered almost exclusively by Britons with the rank-and-file predominantly from Yemen, the force had the look of a foreign enterprise.<sup>487</sup> Following the strike at Umm Said, both the British adviser to the Ruler and

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid, Letter from Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary) to Shaikh Salman bin Al Khalifah (ruler of Bahrain), 26 July 1956.

<sup>486</sup> TNA FO 1016/518, Derrick Carden (Political Agent, Qatar) to Bernard Burrows, 11 January 1956.

<sup>487</sup> The one exception was Muhammad al-Attiyah who began his career as the only Qatari Policeman, but ended up as the Brigadier commanding the Armed Forces. See below.

Political Agent tried to influence Shaikh Ali to back his own police in their attempt to uphold law and order. Though it is unclear what effect this lobbying had, it seems more than coincidental that at the same time batons, shields, helmets, and tear gas were ordered, a new fort and police headquarters were established, and the idea of forming a special wing of Qatari irregulars to break up future incidents was given serious consideration.<sup>488</sup> British hope that the Ruler would now pay greater mind to the police was put to the test on 16 August 1956 when a pro-Egyptian demonstration advanced on, and threatened to overrun, the Political Agency in Doha. The Ruler conceded that he and his British commandant, Ronald Cochrane, had been unwilling to use the armed police because they would probably have had to open fire on the crowds.<sup>489</sup> Ultimately, the armed retainers of the ruling family dispersed the crowd.<sup>490</sup> Reluctant to dispense with his sizeable coterie of armed retainers, Shaikh Ali placed little faith in the police force. This in turn meant that Britain lacked confidence that the Qatari government would be able to protect the Political Agency. A landing party was sent ashore from one of the Gulf Squadron's frigates as a precaution during the incident. The presence of British bluecoats in Qatar was seized upon by the Egyptian press and provided a further warning of how the direct use of British military forces in the Gulf could be used for propaganda purposes.<sup>491</sup>

When he met with Shaikh Ali in the days after the rioters advanced on the Political Agency, the Political Resident spent the majority of the meeting urging improvement of security organisations both in Doha and at the oil installations. 'The Ruler', Burrows told the Foreign Office,

appeared genuinely willing to do this, but there are the usual difficulties, largely the impossibility of getting Qataris into the police force either as officers or men, and consequently the unwillingness of the Ruler to use force against his own people. Underlying everything there is, as in Bahrain, traditional absence of display of authority by Government who have hitherto been able to deal with matters by individual and paternal methods and by lavish distribution of funds,

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<sup>488</sup> TNA FO 1016/519, Bernard Burrows to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 22 October 1956.

<sup>489</sup> This is what the Ruler told the Political Resident when they met on 21 August. TNA DEFE 11/77, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 22 August 1956.

<sup>490</sup> TNA FO 1016/519 J.M. Brown (acting Political Agent, Qatar) to Bernard Burrows, 18 August 1956

<sup>491</sup> Burrows (1990), p. 36.

none of which is adequate to deal with agitation of a more professional kind inspired from the outside.<sup>492</sup>

Perhaps Britain with its experience in 'dealing with such violence' could be of more help, Burrows suggested.<sup>493</sup> The Ruler initially showed enthusiasm to make improvements, but, as Burrows predicted, 'his zeal will no doubt evaporate after a time if nothing more happens.'<sup>494</sup> Despite entreaties from Britain, Shaikh Ali (now in possession of large revenues from oil production) did little to develop Qatar's police, and, perhaps more importantly, he did not give the force his backing. He preferred to rely on his ex-slave bodyguards and irregular Bedouin retainers.

The decision to send troops to Bahrain in March 1956 was taken with great reluctance. The defence chiefs wanted to remove this regular force as soon as possible. 'Every effort must be taken to strengthen the [State] Police to the degree which will release the static garrison,' the Chiefs of Staff stated in July.<sup>495</sup> Although tensions in Bahrain had subsided by October, the LDC (PG) recommended that two infantry companies remain in Bahrain 'to provide cover and support for Bahrain Police during remaining phases of expansion and training,' the progress of which was deemed 'satisfactory but slow.'<sup>496</sup>

Beginning on 29 October, the Suez Crisis inflamed Arab nationalist feeling in Bahrain. The situation deteriorated fast. The State Police were able to keep order in Manama, but Muharraq was in open revolt. After the events of 1956 died down, Britain worked more closely than ever to improve the capabilities of the Bahrain State Police. By the 1957, dozens of Iraqi policemen that Britain had helped recruit for Bahrain had arrived, boosting the capabilities of the police but upsetting the equilibrium between officers and other ranks. In October of that year, in an incident uncannily similar to thirty years before, a Baluchi policeman claiming to have been unfairly treated by his Iraqi superiors walked into the Fort and shot dead an Iraqi officer. Another Arab officer tried to

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<sup>492</sup> TNA DEFE 11/77, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 22 August 1956.

<sup>493</sup> TNA FO 1016/519 Record of Conversation between Bernard Burrows and the Ruler of Qatar in Doha, 21 August 1956.

<sup>494</sup> TNA DEFE 11/77, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 22 August 1956.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee (56) 269<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 'Responsibility for the Persian Gulf,' 30 July 1956.

<sup>496</sup> TNA DEFE 5/71, Residency (Bahrain) to HQ British Forces, Arabian Peninsula, 29 October 1956.

rush the murderer but he too was shot and killed. The Baluchi fired at and slightly wounded the sentry on the gate before finally giving himself up.<sup>497</sup> Britain had no doubts that it would take time for the Bahrain State Police to have a firm grasp of internal security purposes. Whilst Britain's representatives considered that the presence of British troops in large numbers 'have favourably impressed moderate opinion and helped it move towards the [Bahraini] Government' and 'thus contributed to steadying of the situation in recent months,' they nonetheless observed that 'unfavourable press comment is beginning and sooner or later, the presence of troops is bound to become a propagandist issue'.<sup>498</sup>

British officials and politicians would certainly have preferred to leave the maintenance of internal order in Qatar and Bahrain to the local armed police. In both cases (March 1956 in Bahrain and August 1956 in Qatar), Britain was forced to deploy its own military forces.

#### **4.4 Britain and the Sultan's Military: From Support to Direct Control, 1953-60**

Aside from the Saudi incursion into the Buraimi Oasis area, the major spur for expanding the Sultan of Muscat's military came from the protection of oil exploration teams wanting to penetrate the Omani interior – an area where the Sultan's sway was still weak.<sup>499</sup> The Imam of Oman enjoyed temporal power amounting to autonomy in internal affairs over the surrounding tribes around his headquarters in Nizwa. He was nominally under the suzerainty of the Sultan but had recently tried to assert his independence and had received Saudi and Egyptian assistance. Sultan Said had tried to court the support of tribal leaders of the interior through subsidies and what little patronage he could offer, but he could not guarantee the safety of oil company geologists.<sup>500</sup> Prospecting parties from the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) – or more precisely, its subsidiary entity Petroleum Development, Oman (PDO) – wanted to survey a strip of land, known as Huqf, where four prominent tribes converged, all of

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<sup>497</sup> Belgrave (1960), p. 35.

<sup>498</sup> TNA DEFE 5/71, Residency (Bahrain) to HQ British Forces, Arabian Peninsula, 29 October 1956.

<sup>499</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers* (New York, 1964), p. 40.

<sup>500</sup> Allen and Rigsbee (2002), pp. 5-6.

whom at the time acknowledged the Imam's leadership rather than that of the Sultan. When a geological exploration was first muted in 1949, British explorer Wilfred Thesiger warned British officials that if the party went to Huqf with some of the Sultan's retainers, as they proposed, it was 'very unlikely that they will be allowed to land and if they do succeed in landing they will run into serious danger.'<sup>501</sup> Hitherto the only oil surveys conducted in the Omani interior had been done by air; actual drilling required well-trained guards to withstand any raids upon oil camps or to protect personnel from casual attack.<sup>502</sup> Sultan Said and his British advisers estimated that, owing to the numerous militant tribesmen in the area, the expedition would need a force of approximately four hundred men for protection.<sup>503</sup> The IPC agreed to pay for the formation of such a unit originally called the Huqf Force.<sup>504</sup>

The Foreign Office supported the establishment of this force as it would enable the Sultan to better assert his authority over more of Oman. Moreover, because the oil company were footing the bill, it would place no extra strain on the Sultan's already stretched finances. As no private company could be authorised to operate with its own military force, the Huqf Force remained ultimately answerable to the Sultan, but was commanded by a British contract officer, P.J. McGill, who was selected partly for his fluency in Arabic and his experience with an Arab force in Eritrea.<sup>505</sup> McGill recruited two further Britons and two Sudanese officers to train and administer the force.

The Huqf Force established a training camp near Sohar on the Batinah Coast and began recruiting. McGill found it difficult to find recruits and struggled to train those he attracted. By the middle of October 1953, he had trained only 21 recruits for a force that was supposed to be 400-strong.<sup>506</sup> By early

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<sup>501</sup> TNA FO 371/82075, Sir Rupert Hay to Bernard Burrows (Foreign Office), notes of conversation with Wilfred Thesiger, 4 May 1949.

<sup>502</sup> Innes (1987), p. 23.

<sup>503</sup> TNA FO 371/98426, Brigadier J.A.E. Baird (SAOPG) to G (Plans and Ops.) G.H.Q., Middle East Land Forces, 'The Raising of an Arab Force by the Sultan of Muscat for the Protection of our Oil Interests in the Huqf,' 6 August 1952.

<sup>504</sup> Francis Owtram, *A Modern History of Oman: Formation of the State since 1920* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 65.

<sup>505</sup> Innes (1987), pp. 11 and 29.

<sup>506</sup> TNA FO 371/104407, Chauncy (Consul-General, Muscat) to Residency (Bahrain), 13 October 1953.



November, at best only 60 men had received rudimentary training.<sup>507</sup> At the same time, the oil company was heaping pressure on the force, which was now called the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF), to be ready to land the exploration team and equipment by early 1954 at the latest. The Sultan was adamant, however, that there would be no landing until the MOFF was several hundred strong. British officials explained to the Sultan that the beach-landing phase would need much fewer men – it was only when the exploration team moved into the interior that it would need a larger force. At any rate, because British lives and interests were at stake, a frigate of the Gulf Squadron could anchor off the landing site.<sup>508</sup> Nonetheless, the Sultan stuck to his guns: there would be no beach landing unless the Huqf Force was 200-strong and no penetration inland until its numbers reached 400.<sup>509</sup>

The turning point for McGill's tenure as commander of the MOFF came in December 1953. Having raised the number of men to 75, McGill punished ten men for some peccadillo by handing them over to the local *wali* to be jailed. Fifteen more deserted, taking his force down to 50.<sup>510</sup> There was simply no prospect that McGill would have the requisite number of men ready for an early 1954 landing. The oil company, which had already shipped much of the equipment, were disturbed. Feeling he had been set an impossible task, McGill quit his job in a fit of pique the following month. Sultan Said was so furious with McGill that he wanted to take legal action against him for breach of contract.

The setback in building up the MOFF jeopardised the whole exploration operation. The Political Resident suggested that a contingent of Aden Protectorate Levies join the landing party until a suitable force was raised to move into the interior.<sup>511</sup> The Foreign Office, however, replied that 200 Aden Protectorate Levies, some of whom were stationed at RAF Masirah, could not be spared. Moreover, the SNOFG could not guarantee a naval vessel to standby in order to assist the oil party. The Foreign Office did advise the

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<sup>507</sup> Innes (1987), p. 45. The Political Resident put the size of McGill's force at no more than 40 men. TNA FO 371/104407, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 11 November, 1953.

<sup>508</sup> TNA FO 371/104407, Chauncy (Consul-General, Muscat) to Residency, Bahrain, 17 October 1953.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 8 November 1953.

<sup>510</sup> Innes (1987), p. 46.

<sup>511</sup> TNA FO 371/104407, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 26 November, 1953.

Political Resident that Britain 'would do [its] best to restore the situation if the party got into difficulty at the bridge-head.'<sup>512</sup> The Foreign Office suggested that the oil company should fall back on the Sultan's offer to put together a scratch force made up from untrained tribesmen from the Huqf area as well as auxiliary tribal irregulars loyal to the Sultan.<sup>513</sup>

Colin Maxwell of the Batinah Force took temporary command of the MOFF until Percy Coriat, a tall commanding figure with a piratical black patch over one eye, assumed command. Initially reluctant, Coriat had been placed under considerable pressure from both the Foreign Office and War Office to accept the role. Whitehall officials pressed upon him that it was in the nation's interest to have a force in place and under British command.<sup>514</sup> An IPC personnel officer, Frank Haugh, who was a former Hussar Captain with military experience in the Trans-Jordan Field Force behind him, joined as Coriat's number two.

Despite its poor preparation under McGill, the column of MOFF and oil company personnel formed up on the southern shore at Ras al-Duqm in early 1954 with Land Rovers and trucks for transport. They were joined by members of the Duru tribe who were from the area the party was moving in to and whom the Sultan had convinced to offer the expedition team assistance.<sup>515</sup> A crisis of confidence struck Coriat. Claiming he was too old for the job he resigned as the force was training at the Ras al-Duqm base camp. Let down a second time in the space of six months, the Sultan asked Britain to help him find a British successor. Coriat agreed to stay on until Bill Cheeseman, a former Indian Army colonel with experience in Eritrea who was undertaking Arabic classes, was ready to take on the role. The IPC seconded the SAOPG Brigadier Robert Baird as a temporary military adviser and assigned Edward Henderson as its political adviser.

When Coriat and his 126-man MOFF party, along with its Duru tribal allies, set off from Ras al-Duqm in September 1954, the Sultan believed it to be a simple oil exploration mission in the Fahud desert area, but the column

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid, Foreign Office to Bernard Burrows, 8 December, 1953.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Innes (1987), pp. 51, 56.

<sup>515</sup> Marc Valeri, *Oman: Politics and Society in the Qaboos State* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009), p. 52.

became an occupation force of the Omani interior.<sup>516</sup> Supporters of the new Imam had moved into the town of Ibri in response to the prospecting party's penetration. As the column reached Fahud, the Duru tribesmen refused to continue unless their date gardens and property in and around Ibri were protected from Imamate forces. Coriat thus had little choice but to advance 150 miles beyond the permanent camp in Fahud and occupy Ibri. The taking of the town in October was concluded without the knowledge of the Sultan who was unreachable in Salalah.<sup>517</sup> This move served to end the 34-year-old Treaty of Sib which had given de facto autonomy to the Imam in the Omani interior.<sup>518</sup> The Sultan was reported to have been furious that his authority had been undermined by the independent action of the MOFF – a force commanded by British contract officers, paid for by British oil interests, largely overseen by Oman's British Minister for Foreign Affairs, but ultimately answerable to him. The MOFF established a permanent base outside Ibri and in December Bill Cheeseman arrived to take command, allowing a tired Coriat to head home.

Imamate forces did not immediately try to reverse these losses in the interior, gifting the Sultan a year to reorganise his military. The Sultan established an administrative headquarters at Bait al-Falaj for the military and appointed the British commander of the Muscat Infantry, Pat Waterfield, as his Chief of Staff. More British officers were added to the MOFF, which was still largely controlled by the Sultan's British Minister of Foreign Affairs. Innes related that: 'The Sultan had come to look on the MOFF so much as my responsibility that when he spoke of it to me he would call it 'your Force'.<sup>519</sup> Thus a complicated set of relationships emerged between British officials, British contract officers, Oman's British Foreign Minister and the Sultan.

The British government was encouraged by the advance of the Sultan's forces into the interior and wished to support the build-up of his military. Soon

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<sup>516</sup> Allen and Rigsbee (2002), p. 14. See also Valeri (2009), p. 52.

<sup>517</sup> Henderson later claimed to the Foreign Office that when the Sultan refused to evict Imamate forces from Ibri, that he persuaded Coriat to do the opposite. TNA FO 371/185383, E.F. Henderson to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 'Security – Muscat and Oman', 9 July 1966.

<sup>518</sup> For an account of the advance on Ibri and the negotiations which led to it being handed over to Sultanate forces, see Edward Henderson, *This Strange Eventful History* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 1993), pp. 154-200.

<sup>519</sup> Innes claims to have written to the Sultan offering to surrender his responsibilities for the MOFF and Muscat Infantry, but was ignored. Innes (1987), p. 103.

after the MOFF had taken Ibri, the Political Resident recommended to the British Foreign Secretary that Britain should help the Sultan double this force so that he had the means to extend his authority even further.<sup>520</sup> The Political Resident informed the Sultan that the British Government was prepared to make available £150,000 with which to provide arms and equipment for the additional 400 soldiers.<sup>521</sup> In early 1955, Baird submitted his proposal for the expansion of the MOFF. At the same time, the MOFF commander, Bill Cheeseman, undertook a review of the force's future needs. Contrary to Baird and the British government's standpoint, Cheeseman did not think the Sultan needed to double the size of the MOFF; bringing in more instructors to train the men already under arms was more pressing. Rather than build up the MOFF by a further 400 men as, British officials expected him to, the Sultan only planned to add two more squadrons (200 men in total) and an artillery unit of 60 men to the MOFF. Instead he instructed the Muscat Infantry to recruit a further 80 soldiers and ordered the establishment of a new Dhofar Force to counter Saudi activity in the far south of the country. Starting with 50 men brought over from the Sultan's own bodyguard, and commanded by British contract officer, St John Armitrage, who transferred from the Batinah Force, the Dhofar Force remained separately under the Sultan's control. These arrangements rankled British officials, especially Brigadier Baird, who thought that all British funds for expansion should be spent on the MOFF alone. Resident Burrows, however, was willing to take a more conciliatory approach.

We have hitherto been inclined to feel that the Muscat Infantry, owing to its excessively static role, is not really much good for the purposes we have in mind of safeguarding the Sultan's frontiers and extending his authority in the interior. There has however been an important change in this respect in that the detachment of the Muscat Infantry [. . .] is in Dhofar manning the most forward post there at Wadi Mugshin and that the Sultan is now ready to send part of the existing artillery unit of the Muscat Infantry into the interior if this is necessary before the new artillery unit is ready.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> TNA FO 371/114679, Bernard Burrows to L.A.C. Fry (Foreign Office), 5 April 1955.

<sup>521</sup> At this point the Sultan had close to 700 men under arms, excluding tribal irregulars, who possessed about 1,000 rifles and 50 Bren guns.

<sup>522</sup> TNA FO 371/114679, Bernard Burrows to L.A.C. Fry (Foreign Officer), 5 April 1955.

The question over the military's future direction caused relations between British representatives and those Britons privately employed by the Sultan to deteriorate. The former group held low opinions about the standard of British contract officers. The Political Resident, Bernard Burrows, told British Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan in June 1955 that although the equipment that Britain had paid for the expansion of the MOFF had arrived in Muscat and recruitment was underway, 'it was now becoming evident that the Field Force as it is now organised suffers from an incurable weakness in its officering and this deficiency augurs ill for the success of the new expanded force.' Burrows outlined the main issues:

The Sultan as a matter of policy employs only British officers in the senior ranks of his regular forces. When he needed only two or three such officers, there was a reasonable hope of finding retired regular officers or others with similar qualifications to fill these posts, though in practice there was even then too high a proportion of misfits. But now with the creation of the Field Force the requirement has grown and by the time the additional men have been raised, the Sultan will need at least ten British officers.<sup>523</sup>

As the eminent Gulf historian J.B. Kelly has noted, it was 'neither novel nor exceptional for an Arab or Muslim ruler to employ foreigners in his army.'<sup>524</sup> Yet Britain wanted the Britons employed by the Sultan to be competent and amenable, to a degree, to serve British interests and follow its direction.<sup>525</sup> This, however, was not always the case. As one former senior mandarin has observed:

The last century produced a notable roll-call of British military officers who chose to make their careers amid the political upheavals of the Middle East [. . .] The majority among them absorbed a deep familiarity with the cultures and the systems of the Arab societies among which they lived, and a lasting trust and affection which they found to be warmly reciprocated. The diversity of rivalries and aspirations that motivated their new partners they soon made their

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid, Bernard Burrows to Harold Macmillan (Foreign Secretary), 21 June 1955.

<sup>524</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 160

<sup>525</sup> Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher label the phenomenon of Britons operating outside official policy but advancing British interests as sub-imperialism. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1961)

own, albeit occasionally at odds with an imperial authority back in Britain to which they owed their commissions.<sup>526</sup>

Back in 1950, the Political Agent in Kuwait pointed out that 'British experts engaged by local government tend to show a sturdy independence of His Majesty's Government and we must, I think, expect that they should consider their first loyalty is to the local government.'<sup>527</sup> When it came to British contract officers working for the Sultan, this caused much frustration.<sup>528</sup> Brigadier Baird believed that the solution was to have serving British officers attached to the Sultan's military. For Baird there was no alternative but to move away from contract to seconded officers. The Political Resident fully endorsed Baird's position:

The contrast between the state of efficiency and morale between the officers of the Trucial Oman Levies, who are seconded regulars, and those of the Field Force is very striking and fully bears out the view that a change is urgently necessary in the system of providing officers for the latter force.<sup>529</sup>

British officials in particular blamed Innes and Pat Waterfield for not implementing the expansion plan, even though it had been six months since it was submitted. The Residency informed the Foreign Office of their suspicion that both Innes and Waterfield were 'purposely blocking this expansion plan because they were not consulted about it in the first place and are now against an expansion of the Sultan's forces. . . . It is easy for them to ignore our recommendations,' the Residency continued, 'because they are not in fact under our control, being in the Sultan's service, and as we know, he is somewhat elusive person not given to clear expressions of his views or

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<sup>526</sup> Alan Munro, 'Introduction,' in Nigel Bromage, *Soldier in Arabia* (London: Radcliffe Press, 2012), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>527</sup> Op. Cit. from Smith (2004), p. 9.

<sup>528</sup> Often it was the Political Resident or Political Agent who was asked by the Ruler to find suitable candidates for advisory positions. See for example: J.E. Peterson, 'British Financial Advisors in Muscat During the Interwar Period', *Arabian Studies*, Vol. 5 (1979), pp. 131-139

<sup>529</sup> TNA FO 371/114679, Bernard Burrows to Harold Macmillan (Foreign Secretary), 21 June 1955.

wishes.<sup>530</sup> The Residency had strong words to say about the Sultan's privately employed British nationals:

This brings me to the general question of the British officials in the Sultan's service. These officials do not strike us as being satisfactory in their actions on the spot in Muscat as we might have expected. We were instrumental in obtaining them for the Sultan who can therefore regard us as at the least partly responsible for the manifestly unsatisfactory state of affairs which Baird's report discloses.<sup>531</sup>

The Residency requested that the Foreign Office push the War Office to provide seconded officers in future for the Sultan's military. Accepting this local advice, on 29 July 1955 Foreign Secretary Macmillan wrote to the Minister of Defence, Selwyn Lloyd, stating that the problem with the Sultan's forces lay with the quality of British contract officers. He asked for Lloyd's support on providing seconded officers.<sup>532</sup>

As the TOL, with British military support, prepared to move against the Saudi forces in Buraimi in October 1955, elements of the Sultan's military moved into the interior towards the oasis. This advance of the Sultan's forces became the first move in what the Sultan's British Foreign Ministry later called the 'Grand Design'. In short, it was a bid to take complete control over all of Oman for the Sultan.<sup>533</sup> The Sultan's plan had the strong backing of British Foreign Secretary Macmillan. In spite of the criticism from other Arab states that the Sultan's move was 'the action of a British puppet manipulated in our interests,' Macmillan urged Prime Minister Eden to 'allow the Sultan to go ahead and give him the assistance he needs. We have encouraged him to prepare for it, and he is showing a very stout spirit.'<sup>534</sup> On 13 December 1955, 340 men and eight British officers of the MOFF with dozens of Land Rovers and a number of three-ton trucks carrying, amongst other things, light mortars and four pack guns and their crews from the Muscat Infantry began moving further into the Omani interior. A small number of officers and specialists from the TOL, RAF

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<sup>530</sup> TNA FO 371/114678, Charles A. Gault (Political Agent, Bahrain) to L.A.C. Fry (Foreign Office), 18 July 1955.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> TNA FO 371/114678, Harold Macmillan (Foreign Secretary) to Selwyn Lloyd (Minister of Defence), 29 July 1955.

<sup>533</sup> Innes (1987), pp. 136-59.

<sup>534</sup> DEFE 11/109, Harold Macmillan (Foreign Secretary) to Anthony Eden (Prime Minister), 17 November 1955.

observers and a selection of tribal leaders joined this makeshift force. On 15 December the column, as it was advancing into opposition heartland, received word that the Imam had fled. Soon after, Nizwa, the Imamate capital, fell without incident. Simultaneously, the Batinah Force, which had hitherto confined its role to patrolling the coast to prevent resupply of Imamate forces, marched on Rustaq, the stronghold of the Imam's brother. There they encountered stiff resistance but the town was taken. With the completion of this action, the unification of the interior and the coastal region was almost complete.

Although faced with the task of maintaining a grip on the interior after the successful campaigning at the end of 1955, the Sultan displayed a general aversion to increasing spending on the military. From its side, the British government did not want to provide an annual military subsidy to the Sultan as it did in Jordan with the Arab Legion – a force portrayed by Egypt as a puppet of British imperialism. Britain had been willing, however, in 1954-5 to pay a one-off payment of £150,000 to help the Sultan take control of his territory with the wider strategic aim of resisting Saudi encroachment in the Trucial Oman area. What the British government did want to contribute were more seconded officers to replace what it considered to be substandard contract officers. The British Defence Coordination Committee (Middle East) considered that 'high quality Arabic speaking British regular officers would make a great difference to the efficiency of the [Sultan's forces] and enhance the United Kingdom's influence with the Sultan.'<sup>535</sup> The Chiefs of Staff in March 1956 concurred, stating that,

[. . .] the provision of British regular officers would greatly increase the efficiency of the [Sultan's forces] and the War Office have already indicated that they are prepared in the first instance to provide up to ten. We consider that the Political Resident should be asked to seize any favourable opportunity to promote joint planning, exercises and liaison between the Sultan's forces and those under our control.<sup>536</sup>

The Consul-General, Leslie Chauncy, enquired through Pat Waterfield (the Sultan's Chief of Staff) whether the Sultan would accept British officers on secondments. The Sultan rejected this proposal on the grounds of the higher

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<sup>535</sup> TNA DEFE 5/66, British Defence Coordination Committee (ME), 'Defence of the Arabian Peninsula,' Annex to Chiefs of Staff Meeting (56) 106, 15 March 1956.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.



pay of these officers and their restricted conditions of service. Yet the Residency also suspected that the Sultan and his British military contract officers feared that:

[. . .] we [the British Government] would exploit the presence of these serving British officers as a means of establishing a more direct measure of control and command over the Sultanate Force than a present exists or than Waterfield and the Sultan would wish to see.<sup>537</sup>

Whilst the Foreign Office and the Residency wanted greater British influence over the Sultan's forces – exercised through seconded officers – they were also wary of putting a too-British face on this local military. 'A western style, and to some extent, centrally controlled force [in Muscat and Oman] under British officers might be regarded in a similar sort of light to the way the Qatar Police are regarded by the Qataris,' the Foreign Office warned.<sup>538</sup> There may also have been a more calculated reason at play as to why Britain did not want Muscat and Oman's forces to expand independently of British oversight. The Foreign Office and War Office were in agreement that whilst it was in Britain's interests for the Sultan to have the wherewithal to maintain his authority throughout Oman, he should not be permitted to become too strong internally and 'to be tempted and able to dispense with British advice and support.'<sup>539</sup> Nonetheless, there was confluence when it came to the view that the Sultan should be able to have capacity to counter Saudi encroachment.

In March 1956, British military planners, restructuring Britain's defence architecture for the whole Arabian Peninsula, proposed a further expansion of the MOFF from three rifle squadrons to five. They also wanted the force to operate even more closely with the TOS, coordinating joint training so that, in the event of a Saudi threat to Muscat, combined operations could be conducted under the command of the Senior Army Officer Persian Gulf (SAOPG). The idea of greater integration between Muscat and Oman's<sup>540</sup> military and the TOS reached such a level that in April 1956 the SAOPG, Brigadier Baird, put in place

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<sup>537</sup> TNA FO 1016/486, F.B. Richards (Bahrain Residency) to Christopher M. Pirie-Gordon (Foreign Office), 20 May 1956.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid, Foreign Office and War Office Comments, 31 October 1956.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> After the Sultan's successful advance into the interior, the state was hereafter referred to as Muscat and Oman.

joint operational instructions to defend Buraimi Oasis area.<sup>541</sup> It was even proposed the following year that the Commander Land Forces, Persian Gulf – the SAOPG’s new title – should be appointed as an inspector-general of the Muscat and Oman Armed Forces and that the commander of the TOS should be field commander during any operation that involved both forces.

Slow progress in building up the Muscat and Oman Field Force was frustrating Brigadier Baird. The IPC had provided funds and arms for a force of 800 men, but the force fell well short of this number.<sup>542</sup> The small Batinah Force, commanded by two British officers, had less than a hundred men and the Dhofar Force was only 60 strong.<sup>543</sup> British officials also complained that the Muscat Infantry was well short of its target strength of 270 men.<sup>544</sup> Moreover, the training depot at Ghobra only had 100 recruits.<sup>545</sup> At an earlier meeting with the Sultan, the Consul-General, and Pat Waterfield in January 1956, the Political Resident, Sir Bernard Burrows, had stressed the need for the Sultan to maintain a mobile reserve of troops to block a Saudi advance against Buraimi or the western frontier. With such a reserve force earmarked, the Political Resident was content that the Sultan’s reorganisation plans were sufficient, despite being below Baird’s previous recommendation.<sup>546</sup> In February 1956, the Sultan made it clear that he alone retained the right to structure his force how he wished. The Sultan issued *Directive No. 1* that stated that as sovereign and commander-in-chief, he retained sole authority for ‘(a) The strategic employment and

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<sup>541</sup> TNA FO 1016/544, Brigadier J.E.A. Baird (SAOPG), ‘Defence of Buraimi Oasis’, 3 April 1956.

<sup>542</sup> At the beginning of 1956, the MOFF HQ Squadron and part of the artillery detachment were stationed at Ibri. There were further squadrons at Nizwa and Sharqiyya and small 25-man detachment at Ras al-Hadd.

<sup>543</sup> The two under-strength squadrons were positioned at Sohar and Buraimi.

<sup>544</sup> There were only 200 men in the force, 50 of whom were guarding the main approach through Wadi Sumail.

<sup>545</sup> These were earmarked, after graduation, for the Batinah Force and the Muscat and Oman Field Force. Because the Muscat Infantry still used Urdu, it trained its own recruits.

<sup>546</sup> TNA FO 1016/486, Memorandum by Bernard Burrows, ‘Re-organisation of Muscat Forces,’ 20 January 1956. Paper discussed at the Local Defence Committee, Persian Gulf. The main shortfalls for Baird were that the Sultan had not doubled the size of the MOFF and that the Batinah Force had no transport so it was unable to fulfill its designated role as a relief force for Buraimi should the TOS be needed to block a Saudi advance into the western approaches.

deployment policy of the Armed Force; (b) Defence expenditure and Establishments.<sup>547</sup>

The internal dynamics of the Muscat and Oman state reduced the ability of the Sultan to professionalize parts of his security apparatus. The Consul-General, Leslie Chauncy, had been trying to convince the Sultan of the merits in setting up an armed police to take over guard and garrison duties (i.e. jails, palaces, gates and so forth), but the Sultan was reluctant to do away with *askars* who were detached to support *walis* (regional governors) in every part of the Sultanate. The *askars* were supplied at the request of leaders of tribes who supported the Sultan and it was an important patronage mechanism. It afforded the Sultan, according to Chauncy, 'a means of attaining support and showing confidence and favour.' The Sultan had reportedly told Chauncy on many occasions that 'although the Sultanate is in theory an absolute monarchy, each man with his rifle is in fact his police and his army, and he can do nothing without consultation with and support of the tribes.'<sup>548</sup>

The threat to the Sultan's newly acquired position in the Omani interior did not dissipate with the Imamate's defeat. Brigadier Baird believed that the Saudis would still endeavour to encourage dissension amongst the interior tribes and in Dhofar. Baird recommended that Sultan reorganise his forces on the lines of the Sudan Defence Force since the problem – that of controlling territory – and the terrain generally, was analogous to Northern Sudan. He advocated dividing the Sultan's territory into districts each with its own garrison force.<sup>549</sup> In October 1956, Waterfield proposed an increase of 400 men on top of the 1,200 already under arms, as well as equipment purchases to enhance the force's mobility and firepower. There was also a plan to improve local police forces in the major towns with the intention of freeing up the military from static duties.<sup>550</sup> None of these initiatives were enacted and in 1957 the Sultan suffered a great setback.

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<sup>547</sup> TNA FO 371/120625, 'Muscat Armed Forces: Directive No. 1, 1956,' signed by the Sultan of Muscat, 23 February 1956.

<sup>548</sup> TNA 1016/486, Leslie Chauncy (Consul-General, Muscat) to Bernard Burrows (PRPG), 8 December 1956.

<sup>549</sup> TNA FO 1016/486, Brigadier Baird, 'Reorganisation Muscat Armed Force', undated (c. January 1956).

<sup>550</sup> TNA FO 371/120625, Views of the Sultan Said and Colonel Waterfield (Chief of Staff of Muscat Forces) on the future of the Sultan's Armed Forces, 2 October 1956.

Contrary to Baird's belief, Waterfield wanted to expand the Sultan's forces. As they were both passing through Beirut in Lebanon at the same time, Waterfield and Burrows sat down on 1 October to discuss the future of the military. The Sultan's British Chief of Staff told the Political Resident that he agreed that the Sultan's forces should be enlarged and made more mobile. He also told Burrows that police should be located in all the major towns with a Home Guard formed in the villages. According to Waterfield, the Sultan had shown interest in these ideas, but that he was concerned about the financial implications. Moreover, the Sultan had recently reiterated to Waterfield that he was reluctant to take on commitments now that he could not pay for in the future if oil was not found. Thus, until the Sultan knew that there was oil he refused to borrow money. The Political Resident speaking unofficially told Waterfield that:

I had always had it in the back of my mind that if it turned out there was no oil in Muscat we might very well be faced with the decision whether we would treat Muscat in somewhat the same kind of way as we had treated Jordan in the matter of financial assistance for the armed forces. It was, however, always particularly difficult for us to financially commit ourselves for more than one year at a time and I thought that there might even be some disadvantages from Muscat's point of view if we were to provide an open and regular subsidy. It was already represented by Egypt and Saudi Arabia that Muscat was under British control and could not speak for itself. The fact of British subsidy would confirm such ideas and to that extent weaken Muscat's voice in the Arab World.<sup>551</sup>

On the 31 October 1956, Mr Riches of the Foreign Office gave a surprising response to Burrow's despatch after his conversation with Waterfield. The Foreign Office told the Political Resident that whilst it supported the idea for a police presence in the major towns the proposed expansion of the military was unnecessary. He laid out his reasoning by making the following points:

Our view of our military relations with the Muscat Government is that we should accept that the Sultan must be dependent on us for defence against serious external (i.e. Saudi) aggression. Internally his forces should be organised so that the Sultan may: (a) protect the operations of the oil company; (b) dispose sufficient strength in the last resort to maintain his authority throughout Muscat and Oman.

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<sup>551</sup> TNA FO 371/120625, Bernard Burrows to D.M.H. Riches (Foreign Office), 2 October 1956.

But that authority should normally be achieved by political means only. The armed forces should not be regarded as a means of enforcing unpopular measures.<sup>552</sup>

Riches raised a third point that he felt should guide British policy on this subject, which was that 'we [Britain] should prefer that the Sultan should not feel himself so strong *internally* [original emphasis] as to be tempted and able to dispense with British advice and support.' Even if the Foreign Office supported the expansion plans, Mr Riches made it clear that no money would be forthcoming from Britain. Yet without British financial assistance, the Sultan was not willing to allocate more money for his military.<sup>553</sup>

The Sultan entered 1957 with high hopes for the future. Oil, however, was not found.<sup>554</sup> To make matters worse, a bid by his opponents to resurrect the Imamate in 1957 put the Sultan on the back foot and forced him to accept greater British management over his military.<sup>555</sup> That year, Imamate forces stole back into Oman with Saudi financial backing and support from the leader of the Bani Riyam tribe, Sulaiman bin Hiymar and the MOFF (which had recently been renamed the Oman Regiment in March of that year) moved to confront the rebels. After suffering a series of setbacks, the Oman Regiment retreated to Fahud. This left the path clear for the Imam's forces to retake Nizwa and other important interior towns as well as maintaining complete control of the vast Jebel Akhdar area. Muscat and Oman's British Minister for Foreign Affairs, Neil McLeod Innes, was derided in British newspapers for not heeding the calls made by the British authorities to expand the military, especially the MOFF, during the previous 12 months.<sup>556</sup>

Unable to defeat Imamate forces, Sultan Said had with few options but to ask for British military assistance. Britain moved units of the TOS into positions in Oman and sent a company of British infantry (the Cameronians) from Bahrain

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<sup>552</sup> TNA FO 1016/486, D.M.H. Riches (Foreign Office) to Bernard Burrows, 31 October 1956.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Innes (1987), p. 206.

<sup>555</sup> J.E. Peterson, 'Britain and 'the Oman War': an Arabian Entanglement,' *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (1976).

<sup>556</sup> Innes (1987), p. 223.

to Ibri.<sup>557</sup> Further British detachments from Sharjah arrived at Buraimi and Baraka to relieve the TOS. Britain flew in a third company from Kenya to Ibri and a troop of the 15/19<sup>th</sup> the King's Royal Hussars with Ferret armoured cars from Aden.<sup>558</sup> Once assembled, the conglomerate force moved against Imamate positions. The RAF flew in supplies and reinforcements and Venoms from Sharjah gave close air support with machine-gun fire and rocket attacks.<sup>559</sup> In August, the joint force seized Nizwa, Bahla and Izki without encountering much resistance. The Imam's remaining supporters sought shelter in the vastness of Jebel Akhdar.

After much of the interior, apart from Jebel Akhdar, was retaken, the Sultan moved against his military which had failed to stop the Imamate force's early advance. He disbanded the Oman Regiment and sacked its commander, Bill Cheeseman. The remnants of the Oman Regiment merged with the Batinah Force to form the new 450-man Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR) headquartered at Nizwa and under the command of a British contract officer, Colin Maxwell. The Sultan reached out again for further British succour to build up his forces.

Through signing in 1958 an 'Exchange of Letters', the Sultan gave Britain de facto control over the newly designated Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). The re-organisation came into effect on 23 April 1958. Under British auspices, the military was overhauled.<sup>560</sup> In short, the aim was to create a force that could retain control of the interior for the Sultan.<sup>561</sup>

Colonel Pat Waterfield assumed the office of Minister of Defence whilst Britain selected Colonel David Smiley to Command the SAF.<sup>562</sup> Smiley was a former British officer with a wide experience of irregular warfare in Albania and Thailand during the Second World War. Colin Maxwell, the British contract

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<sup>557</sup> The role of the Cameronians in 1957 has been described in John Baynes, *The History of the Cameronians; vol. 4: The Close of Empire, 1948-1968* (London: Cassell, 1971), pp. 91-126.

<sup>558</sup> Lunt (1981), p. 100.

<sup>559</sup> Anthony Shepherd, *Arabian Adventure* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 47-9.

<sup>560</sup> J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 94.

<sup>561</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 87.

<sup>562</sup> The SAF now comprised a HQ unit, an Artillery Troop, the Gobrah Training Centre, the Muscat Regiment and the Northern Frontier Regiment (the Dhofar Guard remained under the direct control on the Sultan and outside the SAF system).

officer in charge of the NFR, was appointed his second-in-command.<sup>563</sup> Whilst Smiley officially served the Sultan, officials in London made it clear that he could challenge, through appealing to the Political Resident, any order given by the Sultan that he considered contrary to British interests. As such, Smiley considered his immediate superior to be the British Army's Commander Land Forces, Persian Gulf in Bahrain.<sup>564</sup> 'I was an officer not only of the Sultan but of the Queen, and my first duty was to the Queen,' Smiley wrote in his memoirs.<sup>565</sup> With a seconded officer now at the helm, Britain had the influence that it felt had been necessary in the Sultan's military for many years.<sup>566</sup>

The SAF Smiley took control of in April 1958 included the Muscat Regiment (as the Muscat Infantry was now called) commanded by Briton Mike Reid who had replaced Frank Haugh; the Northern Frontier Regiment; the Sultan's Air Force, composed of two single-engine Pioneer airplanes flown by RAF pilots and used for communication and casualty evacuation; the Sultan's Navy, which now had five ships (two harbour defence launches, a native boom, and two native dhows); and an intelligence branch under Malcolm Dennison (who served in this position until 1983).

Along with Smiley came an influx of British military personnel and equipment.<sup>567</sup> The Northern Frontier Regiment gained artillery, scout cars and instructors seconded from the British Royal Marines Corps. Another British officer and 25 trainers reorganised the SAF training brigade. Jasper Coates, a retired RAF officer with prior experience in Bahrain as the Senior RAF officer Persian Gulf, and who had joined the SAF in 1957, assumed command of a new gendarmerie force for the Batinah Coast that initially consisted of a group of Persian smugglers – due to their previous nefarious activities they knew the area intimately. Simultaneously, the Senior RAF Officer Persian Gulf (SRAFOPG) conducted a study for expanding the Sultan's Air Force. Though the creation of an air force would not do away with the need for RAF support, the British military chiefs saw several advantages in building up indigenous

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<sup>563</sup> Peterson (1979), p. 94.

<sup>564</sup> Allen and Rigsbee (2002), pp. 18-9.

<sup>565</sup> David Smiley, *Arabian Assignment* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975).

<sup>566</sup> Uzi Rabi, *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Said bin Taymur, 1932-1970* (Eastborne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), p. 117.

<sup>567</sup> Smiley claims that there were 50 British personnel at all ranks in Oman during his spell as SAF commander (he left his post in April 1961).

striking power from the air. Firstly, on occasions when offensive action by Sultanate Air Force would be adequate without the need for RAF support, Britain would avoid the international publicity and odium associated with British air operations against Arabs. Secondly, the Sultan would be in a position to use his aircraft immediately – use of the RAF required authorisation from London. Thirdly, the military chiefs thought that the Sultan might be willing to carry out air strikes more ruthlessly than Britain was prepared to use the RAF. This, they believed, would act as an added deterrent to would-be rebels. There were also disadvantages. For one thing, the defence chiefs noted, the cost of establishing and running a separate air force would be large and, as such, an uneconomical method of providing air support. Also, the offensive and deterrent capabilities of three Provosts (a multi-role plane designed for reconnaissance, strike and escort duties) earmarked for the force were small, and the RAF would still have to be called upon if anything serious occurred. Thirdly, as it would be common knowledge that the pilots and the whole organisation of the force was British, Britain would still be exposed to international criticism when attacks on civilian life and property were undertaken. The British Government might be in a position of accountability whilst unable to ensure that the Sultan used the weapon sparingly and with proper safeguards. Finally, it could degrade the political advantages of having the Sultan dependent on the RAF for reconnaissance duties and air transport.<sup>568</sup> After reviewing the pros and cons, the defence chiefs recommended that it would be far better for the Sultan to establish a competent armoured car squadron if he wanted striking power in the country. Nonetheless, British Cabinet ministers agreed to assist Sultan in establishing an air force, helping to finance the purchase of three Provosts and two Pioneers (used for freight and light transport).<sup>569</sup> The Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) was commanded by a British squadron leader and also had two British flight lieutenants and four flying officers on secondment, RAF personnel serviced the aircraft until a private British contractor, Airworks, took over.<sup>570</sup> The

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<sup>568</sup> TNA FO 371/126954, H. Beeley (Foreign Office) to Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), 'Muscat Air Force,' 10 December 1957.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> TNA FO 371/140192, Note by Squadron Leader G.B. Atkinson (OC SOAF), 'Sultan of Oman's Air Force.' November 1959.



SOAF became operational at Bait al-Falaj (Muscat) in 1959.<sup>571</sup> The foundations of Sultan of Oman's Navy (SON) were also laid down at this time.<sup>572</sup>

British influence had been pervasive in the Sultanate's security forces since the formation of the Muscat Levy Corps in 1921; with the signing of the 1958 'Exchange of Letters', Britain's position was paramount. The CLFPG, Brigadier Baird, claimed to now be in control of the budgeting, reorganisation and training of the Sultan's military.<sup>573</sup> Yet greater control brought greater responsibility, and Britain now had to bankroll much of this expansion and reequipping. The Foreign Office fretted that, like with the TOS, the three Services would try to push most of the costs its way. In a June 1958 internal memorandum, one senior mandarin outlined his worries about the costs incurred in the setting up of an air force for the Sultan:

What I understand the Secretary of State [for Foreign Affairs] to have in mind was that instead of the Service Departments working out the detailed cost of a Muscat Air Force and then expecting the Foreign Office to pay (including the salaries of British officers and presumably here and there a percentage of 'departmental charges'!), they should adopt a more brotherly attitude and squeeze what they can out of their existing personnel and material to help the Muscat Air Force without insisting on every ounce of flesh from the Foreign Office vote; in short to 'take the Muscat Air Force under their wing.'<sup>574</sup>

Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd later explained the British government's thinking: 'The policy adopted by Her Majesty's Government in 1958 was directed at ensuring that, if at all possible, British forces should not again be compelled to intervene openly in Oman.'<sup>575</sup> The expanded and reorganised SAF failed to get to grips with rebel forces in the interior, even with continued British air support. Using modern mines, rebels continued to carry out successful attacks on SAF and TOS patrols and oil company convoys in broad daylight. The Foreign Secretary agreed to a request from the Sultan for British Army

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<sup>571</sup> Lee (1980), p. 137; and P.J. Hirst (RAF Officer Commanding Sultan of Oman's Air Force), 'The Sultan of Oman's Air Force,' *RAF Quarterly* (winter 1971), p. 273.

<sup>572</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 204.

<sup>573</sup> TNA FO 371/132579, General HQ Middle East Land Forces to War Office, 'HQ Land Forces Persian Gulf,' 1 March 1958.

<sup>574</sup> TNA FO 371/132579, Internal Foreign Office Memorandum, D.M.H. Riches to Sir William Hayter, 6 June 1958.

<sup>575</sup> TNA FO 371/148931, Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), Draft Cabinet Paper 'Policy in Muscat and Oman', undated c. Oct 1959.

subunits to work alongside his forces. The Royal Fusiliers based in Bahrain were ordered to send small teams of half a dozen men to enter the area of Oman where operations against the rebels were taking place to assist SAF in firing machine guns and as well as mine detection.<sup>576</sup> British military intervention, with assistance from the TOS, was necessary to finally dislodge Imamate forces from their strongholds and bring the rebellion to an end in January 1959. As Smiley later acknowledged:

It was already clear to me that we could never hope to capture the Jebel Akhdar with the forces now at my disposal: they were barely enough to contain the rebels, and not enough to prevent them from mining the roads – as the oil company never ceased to remind me. To add to my difficulties, the squadron of the Trucial Oman Scouts based at Izki were withdrawn from the country in June 1958 and I had to garrison the town with recruits from the depot who had not even completed their basic training. Although they were being very helpful, air attacks alone would not compel the enemy to surrender; in fact, as we discovered afterwards, they caused very few casualties.<sup>577</sup>

In early 1959, the Special Air Service (SAS) with support from the TOS, SAF and regular British military forces took control of the Jebel Akhdar, forcing rebel leaders to flee. Following the complete defeat of the Imam's forces, the British commander of the NFR, Colin Maxwell, assumed administrative control of Jebel Akhdar as military governor, implementing a hearts-and-minds campaign.<sup>578</sup>

Military intervention in 1959 was intended to be a once-and-for-all operation to restore the situation in interior, after which it was hoped the Sultan would stand on his own two feet without the need for future British intervention. However, the capture of last rebel stronghold in January 1959 did not end the rebellion as leaders escaped to Saudi Arabia and attacks in Oman continued. The Saudis, supported by the Egyptians, continued to back a campaign of mining and sabotage in Oman. Three British Desert Intelligence Officers (DIOs) were established at Ibri, Nizwa and Rostaq in 1959. They provided intelligence to the SAF and to the British military.<sup>579</sup> Rather than scaling back its role in the

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<sup>576</sup> TNA FO 371/132825, Philip McLean (Prime Minister's Office) to Donald Logan (Foreign Office), 8 July 1958.

<sup>577</sup> See Smiley (1975).

<sup>578</sup> Lunt (1981), p. 104.

<sup>579</sup> Hugh Leach, 'Desert Intelligence Officer, Nizwa, 1959-61,' in *Tempest* (2009), p. 185.

Sultanate after January 1959, Britain actually agreed to increase its military aid. Selwyn Lloyd prepared a position paper for the Cabinet as to why it was in Britain's interests to keep assisting the Sultan. Lloyd captured what was behind Britain's continued presence in the Gulf: the importance of Kuwaiti oil and future production from Abu Dhabi. The principle reasons for staying the course in the Sultanate in support of this central interest were: (a) the air base at Masirah and overflying rights over Oman – both were required for the defence of Kuwait; (b) the air and land base at Sharjah, which could be threatened by events in Oman; and (c) the negative effect on the amir of Kuwait and the other Gulf rulers if Britain withdrew its support to the Sultan.

After the Foreign Office received a proposal on the future shape of the SAF from David Smiley and Pat Waterfield that they thought was too costly and ambitious, the British government sent out its own expert to Muscat to make a recommendation. Brigadier M.R.J Hope-Thompson from the War Office visited Muscat and Oman between January and March 1960. His report called for significant increase in SAF personnel from 1,470 to 2,140 and for the force to have greater mobility.<sup>580</sup> Hope-Thompson's proposals were formalised in an Agreed Minute between Britain and Sultan in August 1960, committing the Sultan to implement his recommendations over three years. The Sultan was to pay £232,500 annually in recurrent costs of SAF whilst the British government contributed £943,500. Britain also agreed to pay capital costs of £1,025,000 and some additional short-term measure costs and to provide an increased quota of British seconded officers.<sup>581</sup>

#### **4.5 The Trucial Oman Scouts in Britain's Gulf Policy, 1956-61**

A question Britain faced in latter half of the 1950s was whether the Trucial rulers should be encouraged to set up their own forces to perform internal security duties or continue to rely on the TOS. The ruler of Dubai wanted to set up his own police force in 1956, and in the end the TOS were heavily involved in

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<sup>580</sup> TNA FO 371/148931, Selwyn Lloyd (Foreign Secretary), Draft Cabinet Paper 'Policy in Muscat and Oman', undated c. Oct 1959

<sup>581</sup> The Hope-Thompson recommendations stipulated that Britain was to provide the Commanding Officer of the SAF, two Regimental commanders, 22 other officers, four other ranks, and 15 'Junior Leaders' through secondments. TNA FO 371/148938, Agreed Minute between HMG and Sultan of Muscat and Oman concerning the 1958 Exchange of Letters and the revised military programme for SAF, 24 August 1960.

setting up this initiative over the course of 1956/7.<sup>582</sup> Indeed, its first commander, Major Peter Lorimer, was deputised from the Scouts and the force's nucleus were ex-Scouts or untrained recruits put through the TOS training school.<sup>583</sup> Major Peter Clayton, another TOS officer, was also involved in training the first recruits.<sup>584</sup> The British contribution to setting up the force went further than agreeing to transfer TOS personnel. Whilst the Ruler agreed to contribute one lakh (100,000 rupees or £7,500) to the cost of the police, the British Government paid the rest. Major Peter Clayton of the TOS recommended this arrangement because the ruler's resources were too meagre to pay for the force in its entirety.<sup>585</sup> The War Office rejected the proposal that the newly formed Dubai Police take on responsibilities outside of Dubai town. Major-General J.R.C. Hamilton at the War Office explained his thinking to the Foreign Office on 5 December 1957:

An expanded Dubai Police Force, which can only be used in Dubai State, would be quite unable to perform these duties [internal security role of TOS] which really amount to keeping the peace between the Trucial Oman Shaikhs and preventing murder and raiding by Bedouin tribes.<sup>586</sup>

There was a further reason why the War Office did not favour local police forces taking on TOS duties: Britain would be unable to exercise the same control over them as it did over the Scouts. This could easily result in a tricky situation whereby Britain would be required to intervene with its own troops should armed police forces be misused by the local rulers.<sup>587</sup> Taking away the internal security role of the TOS, the Political Resident concluded, 'would involve the creation of seven separate police forces; you will recall that when the Dubai

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<sup>582</sup> Kahlifa Rashid Al Shaali and Neil Kibble, 'Policing and Police Accountability in the UAE: The Case for Reform,' *Arab Law Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2000), pp. 292-4.

<sup>583</sup> The force's second commander, Major Jack Briggs, was a former British police officer who had served in the Bahrain and Qatar police forces. Briggs would remain in charge of the Dubai Police until 1975 (thereafter he was retained as Adviser and Inspector General to the Ruler until 1998)

<sup>584</sup> Peter Clayton, 'The New Dubai Police Force – Our First Challenge,' in *Tempest* (2009), pp. 170-2.

<sup>585</sup> Clayton's proposal is partially quoted in FO 371/140239, W.F. Marshall (Foreign Office) to S.E. Wigmore (Treasury), 5 February 1959.

<sup>586</sup> TNA FO 371/126953, Maj. Gen. J.R.C. Hamilton (War Office) to H. Beeley (Foreign Office), 5 December 1957. Extract contained in text.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*

Police force was set up we had to promise that it was not the thin end of the wedge for setting up police forces in every Trucial State.<sup>588</sup> It is clear that British officials, and especially the Political Resident, did not want the place of the TOS supplanted.

Through its role in Buraimi and the Omani interior, the TOS had displayed that it had a role beyond internal security duties in the Trucial States; in short, the Scouts had proved their worth in the field. In recognition of this revised role, Britain provided the Scouts with a new scale of equipment suitable for modern warfare.<sup>589</sup> Part of the force was essentially a motorised infantry regiment, capable of operating across Trucial Oman and working alongside other forces in mountainous terrain or in the sand seas of Eastern Arabia.<sup>590</sup>

The deployment of the TOS outside of the Trucial States in support of the Sultan brought into sharp relief the differences inside Whitehall and between Britain's Gulf representatives as to what the exact role of this British-controlled force should be. Should it be a lightly armed, mobile gendarmerie for police-style internal security operations strictly in the Trucial States? Or did its future lie more closely along the lines of a British Army unit, ready to meet any emergency that threatened British interests in Trucial Oman?<sup>591</sup> This conflict between 'the requirement to operate efficiently as a concentrated, mobile, fighting force and the need to keep the peace over a vast area of difficult terrain,' Michael Mann writes, 'was never completely solved.'<sup>592</sup> Having two paymasters, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office, 'who rarely held the same view of the force and its tasks,' meant that the TOS was being pulled in two directions.<sup>593</sup> The War Office wanted to treat the TOS as though it was a permanent British infantry regiment. Its officials contended that the force must be kept at full strength (1,200 men) and the terms of service for the British officers

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<sup>588</sup> TNA FO 371/126953, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 27 December 1957.

<sup>589</sup> Mann (1994), p. 121.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

<sup>591</sup> The Composition of the TOS in Sept 1960 was 37 British Officers, 8 Arab Officers, 86 British NCOs and ORs and 1108 Arab NCOs and ORs. HQ in Sharjah and commanded by a Colonel. All the British Officers are seconded from the British Army. It was equipped with small arms, light machine guns, and 3-inch and 2-inch mortars. Mobility was provided by Land Rovers and three ton trucks. TOS consist of 5 squadrons, which were as of 1960 located at Sharjah, Dhaid, Mirfa, Buraimi and Khatt.

<sup>592</sup> Mann (1994), p. 131.

<sup>593</sup> Clayton, *Two Alpha Lima*, p. 149.

and NCOs improved. The TOS were by the late 1950s a much larger institution than the component parts of their squadrons alone. The Scouts had a network of Desert intelligence Officers (DIOs) throughout the Trucial States (and Oman) to gather tribal information.<sup>594</sup> The headquarters establishment had also swelled since the mid-1950s. Some in the Foreign Office were deeply concerned about the spiralling costs and resuscitated the argument that as the Scouts was set up along the lines of a British infantry regiment, and as they were carrying out tasks more akin to 'imperial commitments', the War Office should accept complete financial responsibility for the force. The War Office shot down this proposition: 'we strongly oppose your contention that the force has now become unsuitable for the work which it was intended [i.e. maintaining law and order in the interior of the Trucial States].' Furthermore, the War Office considered that the imperial commitment role that the TOS played,

[. . .] could well be maintained by a force half the size of the present one. Should the Foreign Office continue to insist therefore that they are unable or unwilling to bear the cost of the remaining 50 per cent of the force, then the War Office would have to consider reducing the force to half of its present strength and leaving the Foreign Office to make such arrangements as they can for taking over the I.S. [internal security] role hitherto covered by the Trucial Oman Scouts.<sup>595</sup>

Military Coordination Committee, Persian Gulf (MCC (PG)) – previously the Local Defence Committee, Persian Gulf, but still chaired by the Political Resident – did not share the view of the Foreign Office that the TOS could no longer fulfil its original internal security role. Only three of the six squadrons were dedicated at any one time to the defence of the frontier, the other three being on gendarmerie duties.<sup>596</sup> In December 1957, the MCC (PG) repeated what they saw as the manifold functions of force:

The Trucial Oman Scouts are at present required to garrison and patrol in the following areas: Baraka, Sharjah, Buraimi, Ras al-Khaimah, and the borders with Saudi Arabia. The commitment also includes the protection of oil company workings, the prevention of

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<sup>594</sup> Donald Hawley, *The Emirates, Witness to Metamorphosis* (Norwich, UK: Michael Russell, 2007), p. 304.

<sup>595</sup> TNA FO 371/126953, H. W. Browne (War Office) to S. H. Anstey (Foreign Office), 4 December 1957.

<sup>596</sup> TNA FO 371/126953, Bernard Burrows to Foreign Office, 27 December 1957.

gun-running and smuggling and escorting officers of the Foreign Office on duty in the Trucial States.<sup>597</sup>

The War Office also believed that the TOS was suitably organised to perform myriad tasks, including the original policing role. Indeed, Britain's re-organisation of the force intended to improve its ability in the field as well as its internal security role. 'I do not think it is possible to define precisely where the interest of one Department ends and of the other begins,' one official in the War Office contended.<sup>598</sup> The Foreign Office in June 1958 seemed to come around to this thinking. 'The Eastern Department,' one internal memorandum read,

[. . .] shares the military view of the importance of the Trucial Oman Scouts. Furthermore, although it is hard to say whether the strictly internal security value of the force, which accounts for the Foreign Office financial [contribution], has multiplied in the same ratio as the costs, the fact is that internal security on the Trucial Coast depends very largely on this unit and that, with the prospect of large-scale oil development off Abu Dhabi, we should not be at present be niggardly in counting the cost of maintaining stable conditions.<sup>599</sup>

Capturing the lessons of the Jebel Akhdar War, the TOS commander, Stewart Carter, set up a Desert Regiment to give the TOS a more warfighting unit. The Political Agent in the Trucial States, Donald Hawley, expressed his concern to Carter, that the Scouts were becoming far too military owing to direct administration from Aden and the formation of the Desert Regiment.<sup>600</sup> Whilst Hawley accepted the Scouts' role fulfilling the War Office's 'imperial commitment', he nonetheless felt the 'prime consideration' was that the Scouts should be a 'truly Trucial States force, which is accepted by the local people as their own.'<sup>601</sup> To make it more of a local force, Hawley advised replacing the high proportion of Britons in the TOS with Arabs and setting up a camel section.<sup>602</sup> To facilitate the Arabisation of the force he also proposed setting up

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid, Maj. Gen. J.R.C. Hamilton (War Office) to H. Beeley (Foreign Office), 5 December 1957. Extract contained in text.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> TNA FO 371/132579, Internal Foreign Office memorandum, D.M.H. Riches to Sir William Hayter, 'Trucial Oman Scouts: Increase in Estimated Cost,' 4 June 1958.

<sup>600</sup> Hawley (2007), p. 179.

<sup>601</sup> TNA FO 371/149137, Donald Hawley (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Security in the Trucial States,' to George Middleton (Political Resident), 5 September 1960; and Hawley (2007), p. 178.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

a TOS school, and 'as an increasing number of boys become literate, I see no reason why most of the administration of the force should not be done in Arabic.'<sup>603</sup> With these measures implemented, Hawley thought the TOS could naturally shift into the likely future political framework of a federation amongst the Trucial States. If the TOS resembled too much a regular British unit – exemplified through the proposal to add a Desert Regiment<sup>604</sup> – it might shorten Britain's tenure in the area, Hawley warned in September 1960.<sup>605</sup> While the outgoing Political Resident, Sir George Middleton, may have given a sympathetic ear to Hawley's views on the TOS, Sir William Luce, the new Political Resident after 1961, did not. Luce dismissed the need to Arabise the TOS, informing the Foreign Office that: 'The only British personnel in each squadron are two officers, and so far as the public in the Trucial States are concerned this is all they see of the British element.'<sup>606</sup> The tension between the requirement of operating as a mobile fighting force and the need to keep the peace over challenging terrain was never resolved.<sup>607</sup>

Whilst the MCC (PG) had stipulated in 1957 that the TOS could undertake limited operations outside the Trucial States, this was only ever intended to mean support given to the Sultan. With relations between the Sultan and many of the Trucial States rulers strained in 1961, the MCC (PG) concluded that 'no account should be taken of the Trucial Oman Scouts as possible re-

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<sup>603</sup> TNA FO 371/149137 Donald Hawley to George Middleton, 5 September 1960. This is a summary and covering letter to a larger memorandum on security issues in the Trucial States.

<sup>604</sup> Desert Regiment was proposed in 1958 as an additional small regimental headquarters based in Buraimi comprised of three squadrons. Donald Hawley argued that he was 'somewhat doubtful whether the formation of the Desert Regiment may not be something of a luxury in view of the generally improved security position compared with that prevailing when it was first mooted and, in my view, as matter of priorities, a small lightly and locally administered Police Force to cover the unpoliced towns and Beduin areas and some development of the Dubai Police Force are more badly needed than this additional military unit.' Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> He argued the point further that: 'The Aden Protectorate Levies, which is a War Office force with as high a proportion of British personnel as the Scouts, is being handed over to the Aden Protectorate Federation as its army, and indeed the Supreme Council of that Federation have always insisted that the efficiency of the Levies should not be impaired by reducing British personnel before Arabs are trained to take their place.' TNA FO 371/157038, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 5 August 1961.

<sup>607</sup> Mann (1994), p. 131.



enforcements to the SAF [Sultan's Armed Forces] for use in the Sultanate.<sup>608</sup> The growth of the SAF in the late 1950s reduced, at any rate, the likelihood that the TOS would ever be needed to intervene again in Oman. As for repelling an armed attack into the Trucial States, which was the first directive in May 1960 issued by the MCC (PG) to the incoming commander of the TOS, Luce believed by 1961 that it would be unrealistic to expect the TOS to resist a committed Saudi attack. More appropriately, the TOS were seen simply as a means of slowing an advance until British military assistance arrived.<sup>609</sup> As an indication of this more limited role, Britain disbanded the Desert Regiment in 1961, which had been set up the year before to act as a striking force.

#### **4.6 Britain, the Kuwaiti Security Forces: Succession, Arab Nationalism and the threat from Iraq, 1952-60**

The meteoric rise in Kuwait's importance to Britain had ignited the debate about British security policy towards the protected state. Britain reached the conclusion that rather than station the RAF and troops in the country it should use its influence to develop the Kuwaiti security forces. This policy, however, was easier stated than implemented, especially when the security institutions in Kuwait formed part of the power play between competing members of the Al-Sabah. Kuwaiti oil revenues doubled in 1952 and again in 1953, enabling the ruling family to buy the allegiance of domestic elites, especially the merchant class.<sup>610</sup> Whilst this served to consolidate their position in Kuwait, there were deep divisions amongst the Al Sabah. In attempting to steer Kuwait's security apparatus in the right direction, Britain would have to work within a bifurcated system: on one side the Town Police, responsible for maintaining law and order and carrying out investigations inside Kuwait town; the Public Security Department controlling the Kuwait Force and police units outside the town, on the other.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> TNA FO 371/156692, Chief of Staff, Military Co-ordination Committee (Persian Gulf), 'Operational Use of the Trucial Oman Scouts,' 28 April 1961.

<sup>609</sup> TNA FO 371/157038, William Luce to Foreign Office, 5 August 1961.

<sup>610</sup> M.W. Khouja and P.G. Sadler, *The Economy of Kuwait: Development and the Role of International Finance* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>611</sup> The Town Police, under the charge of Shaikh Sabah al-Salim Al-Sabah, wore blue uniforms in winter and white jackets in summer. They were responsible for policing and investigations inside the walls of Kuwait Town. Both the Town Police and the

The Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) had run its own guard force and investigative branch operating at its facilities, but the Public Security Department gradually acquired these responsibilities in the early 1950s. Over the winter of 1952/3, the Kuwait Force was renamed the Kuwait Army and was divided into a 1,250-strong Security Force and a 350-man Frontier Force. Armed with rifles, light machine guns and an assortment of vehicles, the Security Force was akin to a gendarmerie. Aside from static guard duties, it also provided the personal bodyguard to the Ruler and maintained a pipe, silver and brass band. The Frontier Force, equipped with armoured cars, tracked machine-gun carriers, jeeps and trucks, operated as a mobile force to patrol desert areas and keep a watchful eye over the northern border with Iraq, especially for smugglers and illegal migrants. Although the Kuwait Army wore British-style battledress and Khaki drill uniforms, Britain's involvement was, compared to the role it played in other Gulf forces, slight. No British officer commanded any section of the Public Security Department.<sup>612</sup> What is more, 80 percent of the officers of the Frontier Force were Palestinians.<sup>613</sup> The discovery of a communist subversive cell in Kuwait may have jolted Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak out of his initial opposition to British involvement. Soon after, he agreed to the appointment of a British police officer, C.F. Coutts, from Sudan to train the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) under his control.<sup>614</sup> The only other policemen were Lieutenant Hawkins and Captain Edge who performed police duties for purposes of British Government jurisdiction. In December 1952, Britain loaned out Major P.M. Boileau from the British Army to serve as the chief instructor of the Frontier Force.<sup>615</sup> The expansion of the military, especially the purchase of 20 advanced armoured vehicles (Daimler scout cars), must have made the need for a military expert unavoidable. Having served in Palestine, Egypt and Libya, Boileau was a strong Arabic speaker who would end up

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Security Force had embryonic criminal investigation departments. FO 371/109884, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary), 31 May 1954

<sup>612</sup> Red kuffiya and black agals were adopted in a similar to the Arab Legion on which sat a brass cap badge embossed with "Kuwait Army" in English and Arabic.

<sup>613</sup> Foreign machine gunners and drivers were recruited from Iraq and Jordan (often ex-Arab Legion personnel) and technicians were for the most part Lebanese Arabs or Iraqi Kurds. The rank-and-file were nominally Kuwaiti nationals, which was an elastic term owing to the fact that nationality papers could be bought for a few rupees.

<sup>614</sup> Robert L. Jarman, *Sabah al-Salim Al Sabah: Amir of Kuwait, 1965-77* (London: London Centre of Arab Studies, 2002), p. 30.

<sup>615</sup> He remained in this position until 1958.

spending almost six years training the Kuwaiti military in armoured car patrolling.

Considering Kuwait's importance to Britain, one might expect British influence to be more prevalent in the rapidly expanding military and police forces. To be sure, Kuwait had in the past resisted British involvement, standing firm against the appointment of a British security adviser. This was only part of the story. Internal dynastic politics conditioned British involvement in the Kuwaiti security forces. That the British Government wanted its Gulf representatives to take a more active role in Kuwaiti affairs is in little doubt. In unflinchingly stark language, the Foreign Office told the new Political Resident, Bernard Burrows, in July 1953 that he must take a greater interest in Kuwait's internal situation, including matters that were previously beyond the scope of British representatives. The importance of Kuwait to Britain meant that:

Her Majesty's Government can no longer afford to confine themselves to the role authorised by the treaties and agreements in force and sanctioned by usage but must also interest themselves in all matters which affect the political and economic stability of Kuwait.<sup>616</sup>

The Foreign Office's remarks were taken to mean that British influence must be used to steer the future succession in Britain's favour. As the two strongest candidates also held key positions in the two main sections of the security forces, this political consideration had a strong bearing on Britain's involvement in the Kuwaiti police and military.

Like his predecessor Jakins, the new Political Agent in Kuwait, C.J. Pelly, believed that the accession of Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak as ruler would be a disaster for British interests. Favouring Jabir al-Ahmad, who was Deputy Commander of the Town Police, the question for Pelly was whether there was anything that Britain could do to 'further the cause of the Ruler in keeping Abdullah Mubarak in his place and towards improving Jabir al-Ahmed's chances of succeeding'.<sup>617</sup> Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak derived much of his power through his command of the Public Security Department. 'He guards the frontiers, holds

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<sup>616</sup> TNA FO 371/104270, Foreign Office to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 24 July 1953.

<sup>617</sup> TNA FO 1016/367, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 31 May 1954.

the keys of the prison and controls all movements in and out of Kuwait,' Jakins had observed back in November 1950.<sup>618</sup> The Political Resident suspected that a combination of solipsism and a desire to be seen as 'the real kingpin in Kuwait' lay behind Abdullah Mubarak's efforts to expand the forces under his purview.<sup>619</sup>

Leaving Abdullah Mubarak's motivations aside, British officials were unsure if the expansion of the Kuwaiti forces was, at any rate, actually in Britain's interests. The Kuwait Political Agency questioned Brigadier Baird's recommendation that he made back in February 1952 for building up local forces. Indeed, by 1954 the expansion of the Kuwaiti military was now concerning Resident Burrows, particularly the Frontier Force, which had outgrown its original gendarmerie role and was now judged to be a serious potential armed opponent in the event Britain intervened militarily in Kuwait and it was on the opposing side.<sup>620</sup> Pelly at the Political Agency concluded that the existence of Frontier Force meant that Britain would struggle to 'take over control in Kuwait by landing a small party of sailors from the Persian Gulf Squadron.' But as Pelly continued, this had 'probably been dangerous ever since an armed police was organised in Kuwait.'<sup>621</sup> A second issue that Burrows highlighted – one that would later be identified with the expansion of the armed forces under the Sultan of Muscat – was that with a large force of its own the Kuwaitis would feel that they could do without British protection, weakening British political influence in the process.<sup>622</sup> What is more, due to the size of the forces under Abdullah Mubarak's command, Burrows questioned how Britain could carry out its responsibility for Kuwait's foreign relations when a crisis between it and Iraq or even Saudi Arabia could be precipitated by the irresponsible action of a military over which Britain had virtually no control. Should Britain be content with an 'indefinite continuation of unofficial command over the mobile part of the force [Frontier Force] by a British officer in [Major

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<sup>618</sup> TNA FO 371/82010, H.G. Jakins (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Rupert Hay (Political Resident), 16 November 1950.

<sup>619</sup> TNA FO 1016/367, Bernard Burrows (Political Resident) to C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait), 20 March 1954.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 31 May 1954.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 31 May 1954.

Peter] Boileau's position' or should Britain, Burrow's pondered, 'insist on a more senior officer being appointed as [Abdullah] Mubarak's military adviser?' Pelly's response was not encouraging.

Boileau is not in practice in command of any part of the Frontier Force and I doubt whether any British officer could achieve such a position. I am even more certain that [Shaikh] Abdullah Mubarak would not readily agree, at least at present, to take a senior British officer as his Military Adviser, and if we could force him to take one, we would have to find a way of ensuring that he was allowed to be effective, otherwise he would be treated like Coutts [British police officer in Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department].<sup>623</sup>

Switching viewpoints antiphonally, Burrows argued that an enlargement of Kuwait's military could also be an advantage. If the Frontier Force was now a serious military unit, Burrows argued, should it not take a place in Britain's general scheme of defence for the Middle East in time of war?<sup>624</sup> Pelly, however, held serious doubts whether the Frontier Force could ever be 'used in a directly war-like role.'<sup>625</sup> Its chief instructor, Major Boileau, agreed: the Frontier Force may be 'excellent as convoy escorts, desert patrols, and small desert reconnaissance units,' but it could not in its very formative stage of evolution be of much use in advanced warfare.<sup>626</sup>

If on balance Britain deemed the unrestrained expansion of the security forces under Mubarak Abdullah as damaging to its interests, what could the British government do about it? Pelly recommended refusing to deal directly with Abdullah Mubarak's frequent requests for British military weapons. Instead, he proposed, Britain should help the Ruler set up an efficient security organisation to counter the growing power of Abdullah Mubarak.<sup>627</sup> Burrows agreed, and strived to implement a policy whereby the profile of the Town Police was raised vis-à-vis the Public Security Department. At 540 men in late

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 31 May 1954.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid, Bernard Burrows (Political Resident) to C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait), 20 Mach 1954.

<sup>625</sup> TNA FO 371/109884, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary), 10 May 1954.

<sup>626</sup> TNA FO 1016/367, 'The Kuwait Army,' [unsigned but probably the product of Major Boileau because C.J. Pelly takes several quotes from it in a later report], 12 April 1954.

<sup>627</sup> TNA FO 371/109810, C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 21 December 1954.

1954, the Town Police under the control of Shaikh Sabah al-Salim were less than half the size of the Public Security Department.<sup>628</sup>

Domestic unrest in Kuwait 1956 led Britain to reappraise its attitude towards Abdullah Mubarak and the security forces under his control. Whether the security forces would remain loyal to the Al-Sabah during the rising tensions was a question of critical import. Yet British involvement in Kuwait's Public Security Department (which oversaw the Kuwait Army and Frontier Force) was limited. There was never the same opposition to British involvement in the Town Police. By 1955, several British officers were serving in police and the force's commander, Sabah al-Salim, visited Britain in July to inspect Scotland Yard, police training colleges and British courts. Britain hoped that the trip would encourage Sabah al-Salim to continue reforming the Town Police and to institute British practices. By the beginning of 1956, plans were in place to reorganise the Town Police, to expand its numbers from 733 to 1,501, and to purchase new equipment. Despite showing an enthusiasm for British policing methods, later attempts by the new Political Agent, Gawain Bell, to get Sabah al-Salim to accept a high-ranking British security official into the Town Police to help with reform proved unsuccessful.<sup>629</sup>

The instability of 1956 led to a tightening of relations between Britain and Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak. Rather than placing its hopes in the Town Police, the Foreign Office now arrived at the conclusion that 'strong armed forces under the control of Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak represent a powerful deterrent to any persons who might wish to cause strikes or other disturbances in Kuwait for political or other reasons.'<sup>630</sup> On these grounds it was recommended that Britain should keep supplying the Kuwaiti military with weapons, for Abdullah Mubarak could turn to Czechoslovakia or somewhere else to purchase weapons if Britain refused him.<sup>631</sup> With no means of stopping Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak building

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<sup>628</sup> Ibid, Bernard Burrows (Political Resident) to C.J. Pelly (Political Agent, Kuwait), 26 December 1954.

<sup>629</sup> TNA FO 371/127007, Gawain Bell (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 27 February 1957.

<sup>630</sup> TNA FO 371/120623, Circulated telegram by D.M.H. Riches (Foreign Office), 'The Supply of Arms for the Forces of Shaikh Abdullah al-Mubarak at Kuwait,' 7 June 1956.

<sup>631</sup> Abdullah Mubarak had informed Major Peter Boileau of his position on this matter. As well as Major Peter Boileau there was a fellow Briton called Major Edge. He was promoted in the 1950s to a Lt. Colonel in the Public Security Department. Ibid.

up the strength of his forces, British officials thought it was a far better policy to curry favour with him by agreeing to his requests for arms, otherwise they could be marginalised in the defence scene.<sup>632</sup>

British policy towards the development of the Kuwaiti security forces between 1954 and 1956 was often contradictory. The Political Resident and successive Political Agents were unable to reconcile the need for strong security forces in Kuwait with the damage that this could do to British interests and its ability to intervene. In the months leading up to 1956 Suez intervention, the Foreign Office had argued against moving troops to Kuwait because local forces were fairly strong and able to hold the position. Britain based military plans for intervening in Kuwait with a relatively small force on the assumption that the Kuwaiti forces remained loyal. 'If they were against us,' the Chiefs of Staff warned, 'operations on a larger scale would be necessary.'<sup>633</sup> The 'vigorous and deterrent action' taken by the Kuwaiti security forces against disturbances on 15-16 August 1956, the high state of readiness shown by the Kuwaiti detachment at the oil installations, and the Ruler's reassurance to the Political Resident of his determination maintain order all assuaged British fears about the Kuwait Government's resolve.<sup>634</sup>

Britain's former policy of supporting the Town Police at the expense of the Abdullah Mubarak's Public Security Department thus came undone during the Suez crises. Whilst large numbers of the Town Police's senior police officers and NCOs resigned over Suez, Abdullah Mubarak's Public Security Department stayed firm and kept order.<sup>635</sup> British representatives were impressed with the way Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak dealt with further outbreaks of disorder on 3 and 4 November. Although the reformist elements had mobilised large numbers, the Kuwait Government had shown itself able to keep order. Thus, in the second half of 1956, Britain's relationship with Abdullah Mubarak became markedly closer. 'The immediate joint interest of Her Majesty's Government and the Ruling family, that is to say the maintenance of public order, has drawn us

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<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

<sup>633</sup> TNA DEFE 5/71, Annex, 'Reinforcement of the Persian Gulf Arising from Operation Musketeer, JP (56)146 (Final),' to Chiefs of Staff Committee (56) 85 Meeting, 28 August 1956.

<sup>634</sup> TNA DEFE 5/71, Bahrain Residency to Principal Officers Middle East Forces (POMEF), 'Reinforcement of Persian Gulf,' 30 August 1956.

<sup>635</sup> Gawain Bell, *Shadows on the Sand* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1983), p. 245.

during this past week very close to Shaikh Abdullah al-Mubarak,' the Political Agent, Gawain Bell, wrote to the Political Resident on 9 November. This was unfortunate, Bell thought, as it brought Britain 'closer to the reactionary elements of the Ruling family at precisely the time when we had hoped to work towards closer cooperation with the younger and more liberally minded members'.<sup>636</sup> Eight explosions on the night of 10/11 November underscored for Britain the need to keep a tight lid on subversive activity in Kuwait, especially as some of the attacks were against oil infrastructure.<sup>637</sup> And from 1957, Britain supplied military trainers as part of a Kuwait Training Team to enhance the ability of the Al-Sabah to maintain order.

The Suez crisis showed how events exogenous to the Gulf could affect the local security scene. The 1958 Iraqi revolution had a similar, albeit more focused, impact, prompting Britain to reassess Kuwait's vulnerability. After the pro-western government of Nuri al-Said was overthrown in July 1958 – and after he, the young King Feisal, and the ex-Regent Abdullah were murdered – the political climate of Iraq and the unstable personality of its dictator, Qassim, had made an Iraqi attempt to forcibly absorb Kuwait a distinct possibility. In response, Britain prepared plans for intervening to thwart an Iraqi attack.<sup>638</sup> The Joint Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee judged in August 1958 that the Kuwaiti Armed Forces could not repel armed aggression by Iraq without outside assistance, but could impose a slight delay. Nevertheless, British military planners thought that the performance of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces could be materially improved if their equipment included some anti-tank weapons.<sup>639</sup> Not all were in favour, however, of enhancing Kuwait's military capabilities. In April 1959, the Air Ministry questioned the sagacity of selling Kuwait fighter aircraft. 'There are certain dangers in Kuwait having an air force',

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<sup>636</sup> TNA FO 371/120558, Gawain Bell (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 9 November 1956.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid, Gawain Bell (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Bernard Burrows (Political Resident), 11 November 1956.

<sup>638</sup> In October 1959 a Reinforced Theatre Plan (RTP (AP) No. 7) for British intervention was prepared and updated to take account of improvements in military facilities, the availability of transport aircraft, and the transfer of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron from the Mediterranean Station to the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf command and the LST, HMS *Striker*, was kept loaded with half a tank squadron.

<sup>639</sup> TNA DEFE 4/111, Report by the Joint Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 'Military Action by Iraq against Kuwait', JP (58) 106 (Final), 29 August 1958.



Salthouse at the Air Ministry told the Foreign Office.<sup>640</sup> 'Whether Kuwait has aggressive or defensive intentions, the existence of another air force in the Middle East,' Salthouse thought, 'is bound to have complicated the political position.' He recommended that the line to take with Kuwait was as follows:

[. . .] the United Kingdom is ready, willing and able to help them with the Royal Air Force at any time they require them. If however they prefer to have some measure of military air capability under their own control then I agree we can hardly deny the right to purchase aircraft for this purpose. But I do not think we should accept this position without attempting to dissuade them.<sup>641</sup>

With the emergence of a hostile regime on Kuwait's northern border Britain worked more closely with Abdullah Mubarak, who, by 1959, had become head of all Public Security and Police Forces in Kuwait, and served as acting ruler when the Ruler, Shaikh Abdullah Salim, was absent.<sup>642</sup> During a visit to London in late 1959, Abdullah Mubarak reaffirmed his commitment to what he called Kuwait's 'British connection'. Under Abdullah Mubarak's direction, the Kuwait Government purchased a dozen more armoured cars and 16 modern Centurion tanks from Britain (eight were for Kuwait's use and eight were stockpiled in the event that British forces were called to defend the country). Military cooperation between Kuwait and Britain moved forward with these purchases. Whilst assuring Kuwait that it would help to build up its armed forces, Britain cautioned that some of the equipment being supplied – the Centurion tanks in particular – required considerable training and expertise to operate. Although Kuwait sent some soldiers to Britain for tank training, there was a growing need to take on British seconded personnel to maintain and service the tanks and other stockpiled equipment.<sup>643</sup> The Kuwaiti leadership, however, feared that the

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<sup>640</sup> Whilst there was no air force as such, Kuwait Aero Club had formed since the early 1950s to provide civil flying instruction. As students were Kuwaiti military personnel brandishing RAF-style uniforms, and as the Club President was none other than Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak, Britain suspected that this was a less than discrete attempt to form an air force.

<sup>641</sup> TNA DEFE 7/1301, L. Salthouse (Air Ministry) to H.W. King (Foreign Office), 9 April 1959.

<sup>642</sup> TNA FO 371/140244, Egerton (Kuwait Agency) to Adams (Foreign Office), 12 April 1959; and Robert L. Jarman, *Sabah al-Salim Al Sabah: Amir of Kuwait, 1965-77* (London: London Centre of Arab Studies, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>643</sup> TNA DEFE 7/1301, HQ British Forces Arabian Peninsula (BFAP) to Ministry of Defence, 'Kuwait Planning,' 25 July 1959; and Miriam Joyce, *Kuwait 1945-1996: An Anglo-American Perspective* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 68.

presence of British military personnel in the country would (a) provoke Iraq, and (b) would provide Cairo – which had a sympathetic audience in a large section of the Kuwaiti population – with an opportunity to claim that Kuwait was little more than a British military base.<sup>644</sup> Unlike in Muscat and Oman, any decision on British military involvement in the Kuwaiti security forces had to take greater account of these strong domestic attitudes. The Suez debacle combined with the appeal of Abdul Nasser's brand of Arab unity served to increase anti-British feeling in Kuwait.<sup>645</sup> In 1959, the emir had to break up a demonstration in support of the United Arab Union (the union between Egypt and Syria) on the anniversary of its inception.

A reassessment of the threat from Iraqi armoured divisions in the early 1959 led Kuwait to risk the criticism of bringing in British experts. Britain seconded a gunnery officer (Lt. Col. Pierce) and three British technical NCOs to offer advice on the use and upkeep of the Kuwaiti tanks. The small team, called the Kuwait Liaison Team (KLT), came under the direct authority of the Kuwaiti military. The Political Resident, Sir George Middleton, thought the KLT, and especially the presence of Lt. Col. Pierce who 'appears to be rapidly gaining [Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak's] confidence', would help Britain retain influence in Kuwaiti military affairs. As Middleton told the Foreign Office:

Abdullah Mubarak appears to be realizing dangers which beset Kuwait and is turning to us for advice and help. Unless this is handled with great delicacy we may give him or the Ruler the impression that we are trying to encroach on Kuwait's independence. We are only at the exploratory stage and there is little substantially that can be done to help except to ensure that requests for supply of military equipment for officers to proceed on courses or for other forms of military cooperation made by Kuwaitis are met without delay.<sup>646</sup>

The debate over what military hardware Britain should agree to sell Kuwait continued, however. When in 1960 Kuwait inquired about purchasing British Hunter aircraft the Foreign Office supported the move as it saw the advantages

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<sup>644</sup> Joyce (1998), pp. 58-59.

<sup>645</sup> In 1959 the Ruler, Shaikh Abdallah Salim, had to break up a demonstration showing support to the United Arab Union (the union between Egypt and Syria) on the anniversary of its inception. Zahlan (2002) p. 47.

<sup>646</sup> TNA FO 371/140180, George Middleton (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 22 April 1959.

for military planning purposes. The Political Agent in Kuwait, J.C.B. Richmond, was against the idea from the start. Britain 'should not encourage the Shaikh to spend money unwisely because of any incidental advantage which might accrue to our military planning.' Many in Kuwait, Richmond argued, would look to these aircraft as,

[. . .] an unjustifiable extravagance. They would go on to argue that our supplying them was a proof of our intention on getting hold of Kuwait's money at any cost or alternatively of getting Kuwait's military forces into our control by providing them with weapons they could only use with our assistance. The opponents of Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak – and there are many – would see this as further proof of British support for his ambitions for the succession . . . .<sup>647</sup>

In the first half of 1961, Kuwait renewed its request to acquire the six Jet Provosts (ground attack aircraft) and sent pilots to Britain for training in advance of the expected delivery. The Air Ministry was worried in July that Kuwait was not in a position to run its own air force. Without proper programmes and procedures in place, the Air Ministry believed the air force could 'meet with disaster.' Officials evoked the case of Sudan which tried to 'go it alone' in 1957. In November that year two Provosts of the Sudan Air Wing collided killing four pilots. The solution for the Air Ministry was for Kuwait to appoint a British air adviser.<sup>648</sup>

Britain would need to tread a careful line between supporting the build-up Kuwaiti forces whilst avoiding the claims by opponents that Britain was pursuing its financial interests at the Kuwaitis' expense. There was little prospect in 1960 that the Kuwaiti military would be able to stand up to a determined armoured attack, and the British defence guarantee continued to underpin Kuwait's security strategy, even after it elected for independence in 1961. Even Kuwaiti opponents of British involvement in their country understood this.<sup>649</sup>

In time, the British Government would seek Kuwait to take a greater role in its own protection, allowing Britain to scale-down forces dedicated to the defence of the emirate. Apart from a potential Saudi move on parts of Abu Dhabi and Oman, the other protected states did not face the same existential

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<sup>647</sup> TNA FO 371/149056, J.C.B. Richmond (Political Agent, Kuwait) to Richard A. Beaumont (Foreign Office), 18 June 1960.

<sup>648</sup> TNA FO 371/156904, Air Ministry to N. Hillier-Fry (Foreign Office 14 July 1961).

<sup>649</sup> Peterson (1986), pp. 90-91.

threat from a neighbour as did Kuwait. In the decade ahead, British efforts among its other protégés in the Gulf were focused on internal security through improving the coercive instruments available to the local rulers.

## CHAPTER FIVE: LOCAL FORCES DURING BRITAIN'S SILVER AGE IN THE GULF, 1961-67

### 5.1 Britain's Resurgence in the Gulf

At a time when it was winding up its overseas commitments elsewhere, Britain was more willing than ever in 1961 to protect its position in the Gulf.<sup>650</sup> Even after Kuwaiti independence on 19 June 1961, Britain remained committed to its defence. Though the special treaty relations were relinquished, Britain re-affirmed its readiness to assist Kuwait if requested to do so.<sup>651</sup>

In the weeks following independence, Britain implemented its plan for the defence of Kuwait (Operation *Vantage*) after it assessed that Iraq was preparing an invasion.<sup>652</sup> The British completed the build-up of its military forces in Kuwait by the first week of July, reaching 7,000 troops. The Iraqi attack never came.<sup>653</sup> Harold Macmillan realised that with every day that the troops remained in Kuwait, Britain's presence became harder to defend against accusations of neo-colonialism. Before Britain withdrew its force, however, it wanted a suitable alternative in place. As a temporary stopgap, a peacekeeping force from the Arab League states replaced the British military contingent. British military experts judged that the Arab League forces were only capable of holding Kuwait Town and the airfields needed for Britain's re-entry from a determined Iraqi attack for a maximum of 36 hours.<sup>654</sup> This meant that Britain had to raise the state of readiness of the troops earmarked for re-entry into Kuwait. The new intervention plan (Operation *Sodabread*) required Britain to station a parachute battalion group permanently in Bahrain.

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<sup>650</sup> Helene von Bismarck, 'The Kuwait Crisis of 1961 and its Consequences for Great Britain's Persian Gulf Policy,' *British Scholar*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (2009), pp. 75-96.

<sup>651</sup> FO 93/137/15. 'Exchange of Notes between Her Majesty's Government and the Ruler of Kuwait,' 19 June 1961.

<sup>652</sup> Nigel J. Ashton, 'Britain and the Kuwaiti Crisis, 1961,' *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1998), pp. 163-81; Mustafa M. Alani, *Operation Vantage: British Military Intervention in Kuwait 1961* (Surbiton, 1990); and Morice Snell-Mendoza, 'In Defence of Oil: Britain's Response to the Iraqi Threat Towards Kuwait, 1961,' *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1996), pp. 39-62; and Bismarck, (2009), pp. 75-96.

<sup>653</sup> Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965: Britain the Al Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 120.

<sup>654</sup> TNA CAB 129/106, 'Kuwait: Memorandum by the Minister of Defence,' Cabinet Memoranda (61) 133, 1 September 1961.

Since March 1956, the Ruler of Bahrain had allowed Britain to station troops in its territory without a formal agreement. On 25 October 1961, Sir William Luce despatched an official request to the Ruler, Shaikh Salman, for his agreement to accept an increase in number of British soldiers on his soil from 425 to 1,100 (i.e. rising to battalion group strength).<sup>655</sup> The Bahraini ruler acceded but wanted the increase to be (a) temporary, and (b) the use of these forces confined to the defence of Kuwait.<sup>656</sup> In Kuwait, the amir agreed to pay for a stockpile of British weapons (including tanks, armoured cars and artillery) and allowed British personnel to remain in Kuwait for its maintenance.<sup>657</sup> By stationing more troops in Bahrain and stockpiling equipment in Kuwait, Britain attempted to improve the resources immediately available for defending its vital interests in the emirate.<sup>658</sup> In the 1960s, Kuwait remained the single most important economic interest in the region for Britain. As a result of this, the primary aim of British policy in the Gulf still remained after 1961 safeguarding Kuwaiti oil production on terms favourable to Britain.<sup>659</sup> Britain's ability to protect this interest was hindered because the Ruler refused to permit British units to be stationed on Kuwaiti territory out of fear of the criticism he would attract from Arab nationalists at home and abroad.

The British intervention in Kuwait provided reassurance to the other rulers that Britain would not balk when it came to protecting its protégés. At the end of 1961, the Political Resident, Sir William Luce, noted to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, that:

Britain at this moment stands more deeply committed in the Persian Gulf, both politically and militarily, than at any time since the last war, a situation which stands in marked contrast with the great contraction

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<sup>655</sup> TNA FO 371/156726, William Luce (Political Resident) to Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah (Ruler of Bahrain), 23 October 1961. See also: Helene Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 44-7.

<sup>656</sup> TNA FO 371/156726, Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah (Ruler of Bahrain) to Sir William Luce (Political Resident), 1 November 1961.

<sup>657</sup> This included 24 tanks, 24 armoured cars, and 12 field guns, as well as engineering equipment, heavy vehicles and ammunition. On the changes to Britain's military posture after 1961, see in particular Bismarck (2009), pp. 75-96.

<sup>658</sup> TNA DEFE 4/140, Minutes of Chiefs of Staff Committee (61) 77 held on 16 November 1961.

<sup>659</sup> Bismarck (2013), p. 29.

of our political and military commitments elsewhere in the world over the past fifteen years.<sup>660</sup>

Yet the series of politically sensitive military interventions in the Middle East between 1956 and 1961 led Britain to the conclusion that the states in the region should take a greater lead in their own security arrangements.<sup>661</sup> The historian Nigel J. Ashton contends that: 'The anxieties caused in the Jordanian and Kuwaiti cases by debates over whether to intervene, how to get forces in, how to supply them, and, crucially, how to get them out, left their psychological imprint on policy-makers.'<sup>662</sup> Despite Britain's continued resolve to meet its commitments in the Gulf, its politicians and Whitehall officials were incrementally compelled to accept that it was more and more difficult for Britain to deploy or garrison its troops in the Middle East. Logistical hurdles, growing international pressure for decolonisation, and the rise of Arab nationalist sentiment all combined to make it more attractive for British assistance to be applied discreetly and informally through local forces than direct military power. After the Kuwait crisis of 1961, Air Marshall Sir David Lee writes in his account of the period,

[. . .] efforts had been made to encourage the various States with which Britain had defence agreements to establish, or in some cases expand, their own indigenous forces with a view to relieving Britain of some, if not all, of her defence responsibilities towards them. The Kuwait Air Force had been formed with British help and equipment, the Sultan of Oman's Air Force had been built up into a viable force in support of his army, and a start had been made in the formation of an Abu Dhabi Defence Force equipped with Hunters.<sup>663</sup>

It is important to not lose sight of the fact that Britain did not believe that local forces could fully step out from the shade provided by Britain's military umbrella. As one Foreign Office official pointed out in January 1962:

The larger neighbours of the Gulf States are notoriously rapacious and it would have been asking a good deal of the most Buddhist-

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<sup>660</sup> TNA T 317/41, William Luce to Lord Home (Foreign Secretary), 22 November 1961.

<sup>661</sup> Nigel J. Ashton, 'A Microcosm of Decline: British Loss of Nerve and Military Intervention in Jordan and Kuwait, 1958 and 1961,' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1997), pp. 1069-1083

<sup>662</sup> Ashton (1997), p. 1070

<sup>663</sup> Lee (1980), p. 278.

minded state not to help itself to the riches of even so modest a place as Bahrain, let alone Kuwait, Qatar or (in the future) Abu Dhabi. We must face the fact that the Gulf States are so scattered that they cannot defend their riches against their larger neighbours.<sup>664</sup>

Nevertheless, the record shows that after 1961 Britain ramped up its efforts to enhance local security capabilities, starting with Kuwait.

## **5.2 After Operation Vantage: The Kuwaiti Military and Britain's 'Air Alone' Concept, 1961-67**

After Operation *Vantage*, both British and Kuwaiti officials began re-examining how Kuwait's armed forces could be better organised to deter future Iraqi aggression or deflect an attack if it came to it. Although Britain judged that Arab League peacekeepers to be of little military value, it reasoned that the force's presence was a political deterrent to Iraq, and this would give Kuwait some breathing space to expand its military. The Al Sabah not only wanted to double the army to 3,000 men, but sought to re-equip it with more tanks, armoured cars, anti-tank missiles and jet aircraft (Jet Provosts and Hunters).<sup>665</sup> In early August 1961, British defence planners offered the Ruler a large British training team to oversee this build-up of Kuwait's military.<sup>666</sup> On 19 August 1961, Sir William Luce told Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that it would be politically impossible for Kuwait to accept a training mission of more than handful of men. Would the Ruler consider hiring a mercenary force of Pakistanis, Macmillan enquired? Luce politely rejected this proposal, for 'there was a prejudice in the Gulf against both Indians and Pakistanis and he [Luce] would be surprised if the Ruler would agree to hire forces from either country.'<sup>667</sup> In the end, the Ruler accepted the presence of some British trainers. The Kuwait Liaison Team (KLT), as the cadre of instructors was called, comprised initially of only one Lt. Col. (Lyon) and six technical NCOs. British military officials soon tried to increase its numbers. Deputy Commander and Chief of the General Staff of the

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<sup>664</sup> FO 371/156670, Internal Minute by E.F. Given (Foreign Office), January 1962.

<sup>665</sup> The Kuwait Air Force remained under the control of the army. TNA FO 371/156893, Foreign Office circular despatch, 'Kuwait – Troop Withdrawal and Re-deployment,' 25 October 1961.

<sup>666</sup> Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak went into exile in 1961.

<sup>667</sup> FO 371/156888, Record of Conversation between William Luce (Political Resident and Harold Macmillan (Prime Minister), 19 August 1961.



Kuwait Army, Brigadier Mubarak, asked Britain for a further sergeant major and a further sergeant to run training in Kuwait for junior officers and non-commissioned officers. 'The Kuwaitis are showing a commendable desire to get on with their training, Ambassador Richmond cabled back to London in November 1961, 'and we should, of course, encourage this.'<sup>668</sup> Whilst Britain hoped that a well-equipped army and air force might delay an Iraqi advance into Kuwait – providing more time for British reinforcements to arrive – there were some who felt that selling advanced equipment to Kuwait might also be damaging.<sup>669</sup> At a meeting of the inter-departmental Arms Working Party on 5 December 1961, the Foreign Office put forward its view that Britain 'should not attempt to sell Kuwait weapons which were too sophisticated for them to handle as this would cause them to diversify and waste their effort and efficiency.' Of course Kuwait should be sufficiently equipped, but this they argued had to be balanced against the fact that it was a small country with limited trained technical personnel.<sup>670</sup> Taking a similar line, Ambassador Richmond railed against the behaviour of British arms manufacturers, who he believed were not acting in accordance with Britain's approach. 'We have,' he wrote to the Foreign Office on 21 May 1962,

[ . . . ] a national interest in the balanced and effective growth of the Kuwait armed forces. Although Brigadier Mubarak has a penchant for shiny catalogues and new toys we are usually able to keep him on the straight and narrow path of military virtue. This task is made more difficult by free lancing by arms peddlers, many of whom are British.<sup>671</sup>

For Ambassador Richmond at least, an effective Kuwait military should take priority over the profits of British arms companies. When it came to Kuwaiti military equipment purchases not related to the stockpile, British officials realised that they could potentially be in competition from the arms manufacturers of other nations. Independent Kuwait's residual dependence on British arms, advice and expertise had a finite lifespan. On the issue of wire-guided anti-tank missiles, for example, the Ministry of Defence could see no

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<sup>668</sup> TNA FO 371/156902, Kuwait Embassy to Foreign Office, 2 November 1961.

<sup>669</sup> Lee (1980), p. 257.

<sup>670</sup> TNA FO 371/156904, Minutes of the Arms Working Party on 5 December 1961.

<sup>671</sup> TNA FO 371/162913, Michael Errock (British Embassy, Kuwait) to E.F. Given (Foreign Office), 21 May 1962.

operational objection in selling them, especially ‘since the Kuwaitis can no doubt get a similar weapon from the French, if they wish, as the Israelis have done.’ What is more, there was an ‘obvious political advantage in having them “buy British,”’ defence officials concluded.<sup>672</sup>

The Kuwaiti military’s ability to offer credible resistance to an Iraqi attack continued to drive British defence policy towards Kuwait in the early part of the 1960s. British efforts to enhance Kuwaiti military readiness by selling suitable weapons and providing a military assistance team had mixed results.<sup>673</sup> Britain’s Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which produced finished estimates from multiple intelligence agencies, assessed in February 1962 that ‘although the Kuwaiti Armed Forces continue to improve, and could be expected to offer resistance, their operational capability is not high.’<sup>674</sup> The Joint Planning Staff at the Ministry of Defence concluded that the Kuwait Armed Forces, comprising now 5,500 men, Centurion tanks, armoured cars, and the recently acquired Vigilant anti-tank missiles, could not be relied upon ‘to hold up the Iraqis, but our plan [to intervene] becomes more valid as the Kuwaiti efficiency improves.’<sup>675</sup> The Foreign Office was ‘keenly interested in the progress of the Kuwait Army’ and instructed the Political Resident to include ‘an assessment of how the latest developments affect its ability to keep the Iraqis at bay’ in any correspondence on Kuwait he sent.<sup>676</sup> Despite a steady stream of Kuwaiti officers and specialists attending military courses in the Britain, a January 1963 report by the KLT, warned that the standard of general training in the Kuwait Army was very low. They pleaded with the Kuwaiti defence establishment to halt further recruitment until the standards of the existing force was raised.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> TNA FO 371/156904, F.A. Kendrick (Ministry of Defence) to G.P. Jefferies (Ministry of Aviation), 22 December 1961. War Office agrees to supply the Vigilant wire-guided anti-tank missile system but not surface-to-air guided weapons. Ministers ruled out the proliferation of such weapons to the Middle East.

<sup>673</sup> Richard A. Mobley, ‘Deterring Iraq: The UK Experience’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2001), p. 70.

<sup>674</sup> TNA DEFE 6/78 Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff (62) 25, ‘Kuwait – Re-Examination of Current Plans,’ 23 February 1962.

<sup>675</sup> TNA DEFE 13/268, ‘Revised Directive to Commander-in-Chief, Middle East,’ 25 May 1962.

<sup>676</sup> TNA FO 371/168766, Letter from E.F. Given (Foreign Office) to Bahrain Residency, 23 January 1963.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid, Letter from Michael Errock, (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Bahrain Residency, 6 January 1963.

Much of Kuwait's own plans to deter Iraq formed around developing air power. Already in February 1962 Kuwait had received six Jet Provosts combat aircraft and eight of its pilots had been trained in Britain. The British government's efforts to exert a measure of control over the Kuwait Air Force (KAF) were hampered by the presence of Colin J. Woodward, a British ex-RAF squadron leader. Privately employed by Kuwait as chief flying instructor to the Kuwait Flying Club back in August 1961, Woodward referred to himself as 'Air Adviser to the Kuwait Army' and acted outside of official British channels. The RAF liaison officer to Kuwait, Wing Commander Calvey, complained that: 'Woodward has made it plain that he resents outside policy assistance from the RAF, considering it as a threat to his position as air adviser to Mubarak.' In Calvey's view, the future of the KAF was not secure with Woodward advising, especially as his only previous experience was with light piston engine aircraft. 'Its [the KAF's] control has to a large extent been withdrawn from the RAF and it will remain thus until Woodward's demise.'<sup>678</sup> Ambassador Richmond proposed to the Political Resident that Britain adopt a more pragmatic approach to Woodward issue:

Woodward has many deficiencies and it is unlikely that he can put the KAF on a sound basis or materially assist in its development. It is likely that he will in due course come a cropper. But for the time being he has [Brigadier] Mubarak's [Chief of Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces] ear and confidence and is reluctant to share this position of influence with an RAF officer. For the present, we shall therefore have to channel RAF advice and assistance through him . . .

<sup>679</sup>

Richmond thought, however, that it would only be a matter of time before Brigadier Mubarak (promoted to Major General in December 1962) would become disillusioned with Woodward and turn to the RAF for help.<sup>680</sup>

On 8 February 1963, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Colonel Abd al-Karim Qassim, was overthrown. This did not immediately alleviate London's concern about the Kuwaiti military's poor efficacy because in March 1963 Baghdad received its first batch of MIG 21s (advanced combat aircraft) from the Soviet

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<sup>678</sup> TNA FO 371/162925, Wing Commander Calvey (RAF) to J.C.B. Richmond (British Embassy, Kuwait), 'Kuwait Air Force', 3 March 1962.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, J.C.B. Richmond (British Embassy Kuwait) to William Luce (Political Resident), 3 March 1962.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

Union. As a response Kuwait accepted the need to bring in British contactors to provide ground staff, maintenance crews and technicians for its own jet combat aircraft. Also, it ordered dozens more armoured and reconnaissance vehicles from Britain. Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations did improve towards the end of the year, marked by the signing of a treaty in October 1963 between the two states. With the perception that tensions had lessened, British planners increasingly focused throughout 1964/65 on Kuwaiti internal stability and, in particular, the loyalty of the military.<sup>681</sup> The British now assessed that Iraqi forces would only intervene in conjunction with a coup attempt against the Al Sabah. As part of its counter-coup plans, the British defence chiefs concluded that they would not be able to produce a large enough force to enter Kuwait if a proportion of the military were supporting the putsch. Was it then wise to make the Kuwaiti armed forces too strong, British policy-makers ruminated? The lure of financial rewards for selling advanced weapons also had to be taken into consideration when it came to British policy towards the Kuwait military.

The potential loss of its monopoly over Kuwaiti arms purchases worried Britain. When it came to purchasing a squadron of combat aircraft in 1965, Kuwait showed that it was prepared to look beyond Britain. They were considering the British Lightning attack aircraft only because the United States had refused to sell them its superior Phantom. Again when the Kuwaitis later sought tanks, armoured cars, and small naval craft in 1968, they turned first to the US, which again told them that they should in the first instance seek to meet their requirements from British sources.<sup>682</sup> As early as January 1964, the British Embassy in Kuwait was alive to this danger:

Being more intelligent as well as smaller than the Saudis, they have so far shown, I believe, little of the deplorable tendency to want arms as status symbols. But supposing owing to the present gentlemen's agreement breaking down, the United States government stops discouraging arms peddlers from attacking Kuwait, this may not last: not merely Americans but later others – including Russians – may arrive . . . .<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>681</sup> Mobley (2001), p. 72.

<sup>682</sup> Mark Phythian, *The Politics of British Arms Sales since 1964* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 238.

<sup>683</sup> TNA FO 371/174609, Christopher Gandy (British Embassy, Kuwait) to J.A. Snellgrove (Foreign Office), 15 January, 1964.

The worry for Britain was not only that it would be nudged out of the arms trade, but also that, owing to the 'the unscrupulous behaviour by the arms peddlers,' Kuwait might find itself 'subject to those private pressures which the Americans deplore in Saudi Arabia; bribes will be offered and a demand thus created for useless things which will reduce the efficiency of the Kuwait forces.'<sup>684</sup>

When it came to a potential order of British surface-to-air guided weapons (SAGW) in 1964, British government opinion was divided. Although the Ministry of Defence wanted Kuwait to buy SAGWs from Britain, it doubted whether Kuwait would be able to absorb these complicated weapon systems.<sup>685</sup> Looking further ahead, the Foreign Office took a different line: 'if Kuwait decided to abrogate the 1961 Exchange of Letters, or if we could no longer count on facilities in Aden and Bahrain, the missiles would be of the first importance for Kuwait's defence against air attack.'<sup>686</sup> A further advantage, the Foreign Office argued, was that unlike aircraft, SAGWs could not be used in support of a *coup d'état*. Rumours of a potential move against the Ruler's life – and that that Iraq would capitalise in the ensuing confusion by making a move on the emirate – was widespread in Kuwait in September-October 1964. Indeed, Kuwait government put the army on high alert at certain points over this period.<sup>687</sup> By November 1965, General Mubarak told British defence officials that whilst a coup attempt was possible, the security forces now had the threat under control.<sup>688</sup>

The increased lead time Britain required for flying in troops to Kuwait in the event of an emergency led to a change in British plans. On the 24 November 1965, the British Government's Defence and Overseas Policy Committee conceded that unless the Ruler gave sufficient notice to move in land forces from Britain or the Far East, and as advanced warning for either event was unlikely, British military assistance if Iraq attacked would in future be limited to air support. This revised plan was not simply Britain cutting its coat

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid, F.A. Kendrick (Ministry of Defence) to D.A. Marston (Foreign Office), 3 November, 1964.

<sup>686</sup> TNA FO 371/174609, Martin S. Berthoud (Foreign Office) to M.C.S. Weston (British Embassy, Kuwait), 8 December, 1964.

<sup>687</sup> TNA FO 371/174584, Christopher Gandy (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 6 September, 1964.

<sup>688</sup> TNA FO 371/179842, D.J. McCarthy (Political Office, Middle East Command) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 24 November, 1965.

according to its cloth, but it presupposed other factors: firstly, that danger of an Iraqi attack had diminished greatly by 1966; secondly, that Kuwait's military had been built up to such a level that it could, with British air support, deflect an Iraqi attack.<sup>689</sup> So whilst this new 'air alone' concept was borne out of the reality of Britain's diminished capability to intervene at short notice with the impending closure of the base at Aden,<sup>690</sup> it also took account of Kuwait's growing ability to defend herself.<sup>691</sup> This was not just a British assessment. Kuwait in 1966 was more confident that as long as the British provided air support its 6000-strong armed forces,<sup>692</sup> which continued to buy more tanks, scout cars and artillery, could repel an aggressive incursion from its northern neighbour.<sup>693</sup>

The Ruler told the British Ambassador, Noel Jackson, in February 1966 that he thought air power was the most valuable assistance Britain could provide. If additional ground forces were needed, his first appeal he told Jackson would be to his Arab friends, including King Feisal of Saudi Arabia who had recently promised him support.<sup>694</sup> Shaikh Jabir, the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, also thought that the revised defence arrangements were sufficient, especially as Kuwait's own air force – which had an assortment of aircraft – was making

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<sup>689</sup> TNA FO 371/185197, British Embassy (Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 16 February 1966.

<sup>690</sup> TNA FCO 371/185420, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to Private Secretary of Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'Kuwait', 23 May 1966. Of the additional forces that were planned to be redeployed to the Gulf after the closing of Aden, the second squadron of fighter aircraft was the only unit whose presence was required exclusively for the defence of Kuwait. All the others, including the second infantry battalion at Sharjah, were required for possible internal security operations in the remaining protected states and the Sultanate. Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*, p. 138; Bismarck (2013), p. 190; and TNA CAB 148/25, Minutes from Defence and Overseas Policy Committee Meeting (66) 8, 23 January 1966.

<sup>691</sup> TNA FCO 8/609, G.N. Jackson (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to George Brown (Foreign Secretary), 'Kuwait Annual Review for 1966,' 13 January 1966.

<sup>692</sup> The armed forces now included an Amiri Guard of 500 men and vehicles which formed a personal household troop. There was also the 150-strong lightly armed Frontier Force, operating as an early warning screen at the Iraqi border. In addition to the military, Kuwait's police had 1,500 men armed with rifles.

<sup>693</sup> TNA FO 371/179848, Christopher Gandy (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 2 August, 1965. Part of the political difficulty was that the equipment was at this time stored at Mishrif, the palace of Shaikh Abdullah Mubarak, who was living in Beirut but was constantly being represented as in British pay and as an ambitious contender for power in Kuwait.

<sup>694</sup> TNA DEFE 11/513, Denis Healey (Defence Secretary) to George Brown (Foreign Secretary), 'Military Assistance to Kuwait', 30 September 1966.

great strides.<sup>695</sup> Kuwait was further strengthening these forces by purchasing 14 Lightning British aircraft and on land by improvements in the army's size (the military jumped from about 6,000 men in 1966 to 8,400 men by the following year) and acquiring more British military hardware.

The 'air alone' concept depended on the ability of the Kuwaiti Army, against the possible background of a coup, to hold the Iraqis at the natural defensive barrier provided by the Muttla Ridge.<sup>696</sup> Operation *Domino*, as the 'air alone' plan for Kuwait was called, was an attempt to address Iraq's overwhelmingly superiority in the air. Chiefly because of the poor standard of Kuwaiti pilots, British defence planners thought Kuwait's air force to be of little operational use in combat.<sup>697</sup> But the Kuwaiti Army also had to become battle-worthy if Operation *Domino* was to be a credible plan. Not all British observers were confident about the abilities of the enlarged Kuwaiti ground forces.<sup>698</sup> Though Britain believed the Kuwait Army could stand toe-to-toe with invading Iraqi troops, these forces would more than likely be needed to simultaneously quell a coup attempt. After all, this was considered the most likely backdrop of any move by Iraq on Kuwait. The balance, therefore, was still with Iraq. Because of this assessment the British wished to step up its mentoring role provided by the KLT.<sup>699</sup> Britain proposed expanding the team's personnel by 50 per cent – from 62 (39 British Army and 23 RAF) to 90 (65 Army and 25 RAF)

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<sup>695</sup> Conversation repeated in TNA FCO 371/185420, G.N. Jackson (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Foreign Office, 'Military Assistance to Kuwait', 22 December 1966. Three DF/GA Hunters, two training Hunters, six Jet Provosts, three Whirlwind helicopters, eight Austers, one Heron, and two Doves. TNA DEFE 11/616, Brief, 'Form at a Glance', a break down the disposition of Kuwait's Armed Forces, March 1966.

<sup>696</sup> TNA DEFE11/513, Chief of Staff Committee (105/66) approving report: 'Military Assistance to Kuwait', 16 September 1966. For estimates of Kuwaiti capabilities refer to Appendix 3 to Annex A, 'Iraqi and Kuwaiti Forces'. On matters related to the Kuwait Army Reserve (KAR), see Appendix 4 of the same Annex. At this stage, the Kuwaiti armed forces could theoretically deploy the equivalent of four infantry battalions, two armoured car regiments and a tank force with 24 Centurions.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> It was assessed by the COS that the Kuwaiti forces could theoretically deploy the equivalent of four infantry battalions, two armoured car regiments, a tank force of 24 Centurions, an artillery regiment and 270 Vigilant anti-tank missiles. There was also 500 men of the Frontier Force, 1,000-men strong National Guard and 1,500 policemen. Ibid. For estimates of Kuwaiti capabilities refer to Appendix 3 to Annex A, 'Iraqi and Kuwaiti Forces'. On matters related to the Kuwait Army Reserve (KAR), see Appendix 4 of the same Annex.

<sup>699</sup> TNA DEFE 13/850, Annex A to COS 42/67, 'Examination of a Plan for British Military Assistance to Kuwait', approved by Chiefs of Staff Committee on 25 April 1967.

and pooling British personnel into a dedicated training team.<sup>700</sup> In the event of a crisis, the British head of the KLT could also act as nexus for intelligence sharing between Britain and Kuwait. As British air action against the Iraqis would be coordinated by British Forward Air Controllers embedded with the KLT, a larger training presence would enhance the RAF's ability to strike Iraqi targets in the event of war.<sup>701</sup>

Britain understood that when it came to overt British military assistance Kuwait was walking a tightrope. In order to maintain an independent sovereign status meant retaining the *political* support of Egypt, which was hostile to the British military involvement in the country, whilst at the same time continuing to retain the British defence guarantee. When Iraqi aircraft entered Kuwaiti airspace in May 1967, however, British diplomats noticed a change in Kuwait's attitude towards the British military support.<sup>702</sup> It was clear to the British Embassy that 'the Kuwait Government, as well as many private Kuwaitis of the older generation, set great store by what they regard as our commitment to defend them.'<sup>703</sup> On 6 November 1967, Kuwait's Minister of Defence and Interior, Shaikh Saad, confirmed Kuwait's acceptance of the revised and expanded KLT.<sup>704</sup>

Political scientists Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett have argued that the principal mechanism, aside from overt military intervention, by which states pursue their objectives in a subordinate state is through creating a dependency in security matters.<sup>705</sup> In the case of Kuwait after 1961, however, Britain wanted Kuwait to be *less* dependent on British military support. To that

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<sup>700</sup> TNA DEFE 24/572, Minute by W.F. Mumford (Ministry of Defence), 'Future of Kuwait Liaison Team,' 17 February, 1967; and Ibid, Annex to 5547/5/CINCME, 'Proposals for the Future Kuwait Liaison Team,' 10 February 1967

<sup>701</sup> TNA DEFE 13/850 Chiefs of Staff Committee, (COS 73/68) with Annex A, 'British Military Assistance to Kuwait' and Appendix 1, 'The Threat and Capabilities of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti Forces', circulated 22 October 1968.

<sup>702</sup> TNA FCO 8/609, G.N. Jackson (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to George Brown (Foreign Secretary), 'Kuwait Annual Review for 1966', 13 January 1966.

<sup>703</sup> TNA FCO 8/677, Geoffrey Arthur (British Embassy, Kuwait) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 9 July 1967.

<sup>704</sup> TNA FCO 8/655, Translation of letter from Shaikh Sa'ad Abdullah al-Ahmed Al-Sabah (Kuwait Minister of Defence and interior) to British Ambassador, Kuwait, 6 November 1967.

<sup>705</sup> Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett, 'Dependent State Formation and Third World Militarization', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct., 1993), pp. 321-347.



end, British policy was to help Kuwait build up its military so that Britain could limit its military commitment to, in practice, air power only. It was in fact an independent Kuwait which sought continued British involvement in its security affairs.

### **5.3 Britain and Internal Security in Bahrain and Qatar, 1961-67**

Whereas the threat to Kuwait was largely external – in the shape of an Iraqi land grab – the threats posed to the rulers of the protected states were internal, especially after improvements in relations between London and Riyadh in the early 1960s reduced the likelihood that the latter would press its territorial claims in Eastern Arabia by force.<sup>706</sup> With anti-colonial feeling on the rise in the 1960s, Britain was even more reluctant to embroil its military in the internal security tasks. Strengthening the indigenous coercive instruments of the protected states became even more important for Britain in this period. This dovetailed with British moves at the time to push the protected states to modernise their government structures.<sup>707</sup> Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart later outlined this agenda in a memorandum to the Cabinet in 1965:

With the object of making our positions in the Gulf more secure and of anticipating pressure from local nationalist movements, we are actively engaged in modernising our relationship with the Shaikhdoms, and this involves keeping up pressure on the Rulers to modernise their own Administrations.<sup>708</sup>

Even though the British Government had no formal right to interfere in the internal affairs of the nine protected states, it nonetheless wanted the local rulers to improve their capacity for governance, including placing the means for exercising law and order on a more formal footing.

The most advanced of the protected states, Bahrain had the oldest police force. Yet Britain's Gulf representatives doubted the ability of the State Police to keep order in the event of a breakdown in security. Even the police's British commander, Robert Hugh Winder, expressed his deep reservations in 1963

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<sup>706</sup> Britain and Saudi Arabia supported the same side in the Yemen Civil War leading to a rapprochement in relations.

<sup>707</sup> Bismark (2013), p. 102.

<sup>708</sup> TNA CAB 129/120, Cabinet memorandum by Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'The Middle East,' (C (65) 49), 24 March 1965.

about the ability of his force to contain disturbances. The Political Resident, Sir William Luce and the Political Agent in Bahrain, Peter Tripp, both formed the impression that Winder – unlike his predecessor, St John Hammersley – was ‘the opposite of robust in his ideas of the role of the police.’ They wanted Winder left with absolutely no doubt that the police were to take ‘full responsibility for measures to deal with disturbances, at all stages of their development,’ and they had to ‘disabuse him of the idea he may have that he can rely on the automatic support of British troops should the police find themselves in difficulties.’<sup>709</sup> Britain was reluctant to use its troops, stationed in Bahrain since 1956, in an internal security role. The Foreign Office was sure that the use of the British military garrisoned in Bahrain against protesters or rioting would be ‘criticised as foreign intervention’. For this reason, the Foreign Office instructed the Residency, the use of British troops in Bahrain ‘must naturally only be used in the last resort, and every encouragement should be given to the local police force to show themselves resolute.’<sup>710</sup> The Political Agent thought that the cause of Commandant Winder’s dubiety was that he did not feel he had the Ruler’s support and that the rank-and-file would not go into action against fellow Arabs in political cases.<sup>711</sup> Reflecting this uneasiness about the reliability of the Bahrain State Police, London invested the Political Resident with the standing authority to use British troops stationed in Bahrain to protect the lives and property of those under British jurisdiction should a situation arise where the police were unable to cope.

In December 1964, Britain renewed a confidential undertaking first given in 1958 that the British would, based on existing treaties and engagements, offer support to Bahrain state to retain its independence. The Foreign Office received legal advice that this guarantee in fact extended to help against internal as well as external threats. This clarification took on greater relevance when the dismissal of BAPCO workers in March 1965 triggered serious

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<sup>709</sup> TNA FO 371/168670, Letter from Francis D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to Frank Brenchley (Foreign Office), ‘Bahrain Internal Security,’ 14 May 1963.

<sup>710</sup> TNA FO 371/168670, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency), 14 June 1963.

<sup>711</sup> The make-up of the 921-strong Bahrain State Police was as follows in 1963: 234 Bahrainis; 22 Baluchis; 285 Yemenis; 16 Mahri; 97 Muscatis; 7 Iraqis; 47 Yaafis; 64 Pakistanis; 149 others including Europeans. TNA FO 371/179806 J.P Tripp (Political Agent, Bahrain) to J.A Snellgrove (Foreign Office), 14 February 1963.

disturbances.<sup>712</sup> The Foreign Office advised the Foreign Secretary that, because there was no Bahrain Army, 'if the Bahrain Police, which is an efficient force with British officers, should lose control of the situation, there would seem to be no alternative to the use of British troops to restore order.' The Foreign Office judged that the parachute battalion stationed in Bahrain, 'should amply suffice' for the task of maintaining order should it come down to that.<sup>713</sup> Britain again reconfirmed that the Political Resident had the authority to use British troops to maintain security if he assessed that the situation passes beyond the control of the Bahrain Police. By mid-March 1965, however, the State Police had regained almost complete control of Bahrain except for parts of Muharraq, and the prospect of deploying British troops had, for now, dissipated.

Coincidentally, at the time of the March disturbances the Foreign Office had sent a British police expert, Mr Turnball, to review the Bahrain State Police.<sup>714</sup> Turnball undertook his assessment when the whole force was mobilised to confront widespread political dissidence and labour agitation. In response to the March 1965 unrest, the Ruler wanted to double the size of the police as soon as possible, but Turnball advised that a period of training and reorganisation was needed instead. The Ruler agreed to implement Turnball's recommendations and hired more Britons, including white Africans of British descent, to reform the force.<sup>715</sup>

Concerned that the restarting of the school year (on 1 October) would bring with it a fresh bout of violence, Commandant Winder met with the Ruler, Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifah, on 29 August 1965 to discuss police matters. The Ruler decided to order more armoured vehicles, to augment the police with 200 Pakistani ex-servicemen, and to transfer a further hundred men

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<sup>712</sup> Abd Ul-Hadi Khalaf, 'Labor Movements in Bahrain', *MERIP Reports*, No. 132 (May, 1985), p. 25.

<sup>713</sup> TNA FO 371/179788, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'Disturbances in Bahrain', 13 March 1965.

<sup>714</sup> This was part of a wider review of the Bahrain administration and economy by the Ministry of Overseas Development.

<sup>715</sup> TNA FO 371/179806, J.P. Tripp (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 5 April 1965, enclosed draft report by Turnball, 'A Review of the Structure and Organisation of the Bahrain Police Force'. In 1965 the Commandant, the Assistant Commandant, Chief Superintendent, two Senior Superintendents, one Superintendent, four Assistant Superintendents and ten Inspectors – i.e. the majority of the officers – were British. Jack Briggs of the TOS who would later become the head of the Dubai Police was initially put forward for the position of Winder's replacement. See also: Ibid, J.P. Tripp (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 25 May 1965.

from the *Naturs* over to the regular police.<sup>716</sup> Bahrain also purchased its own helicopter from Britain for controlling riots. At the end of 1965, the Bahraini authorities asked Britain if it would loan one of its helicopters during the periods that its machine was being serviced. The Ministry of Defence agreed so long as Bahrain was back-charged. The Political Resident and his subordinates were incredulous at this tight-fisted and myopic attitude:

[. . .] it would be impossible to ask the Ruler to pay for an operation which, quite apart from the fact that it contributes to safeguarding the British position in Bahrain, is part and parcel of our defence commitments. One of the duties of British forces in Bahrain is to protect British lives and property. Since the Ruler's own helicopter is performing this duty for much of the time (without charge to us), it would be unreasonable to ask him to pay for the use of a helicopter which took over the job when his machine was out of action.<sup>717</sup>

While the Foreign Office and its representatives in the Gulf were encouraged by Bahrain's attempts to take greater ownership over internal security duties, the assessment by British intelligence that militant elements in Bahrain were preparing to carry out attacks on the refinery and pipeline raised the stakes.<sup>718</sup> This served to refresh the concern that Britain had over the British leadership of the Bahrain State Police. The new Political Agent, Anthony Parsons, thought that Commandant Winder was:

[. . .] becoming increasingly irrational and showing signs of mental and physical exhaustion verging on incipient senility. I cherish hopes that he may now be on the last lap and that we shall find ourselves with a new Commandant by the autumn.<sup>719</sup>

A further problem was that the top echelon of the police was at sixes and sevens with each other and that Shaikh Mohammad, the hands-off head of police and public security, was on the worst terms with the Ruler. To make matters worse, in early 1966 subversive groups began attempting to kill officers of the recently established intelligence and investigation unit of the security

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<sup>716</sup> TNA FO 371/179806, K. Oldfield (Political Agency, Bahrain) to M.S. Berthoud (Foreign Office), 30 August 1965.

<sup>717</sup> TNA FO 371/179806, S.J. Nuttall (Foreign Office) to K.E. Oliver (Ministry of Defence), 15 December 1965.

<sup>718</sup> Abd Ul-Hadi Khalaf (1985), p. 25.

<sup>719</sup> TNA FO 371/185328, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 6 January 1966.

forces, the 'Special Branch'.<sup>720</sup> Parsons believed that these attacks were the 'first move in a general campaign of terrorism on Aden lines.'<sup>721</sup> In response, Bahrain hired Ian Henderson, a colonial police officer with vast experience in tackling the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya, along with four more British and two Jordanian officers.<sup>722</sup> The Special Branch was renamed the Security and Intelligence Services (SIS), which Henderson continued to lead until 2002. Bahrain also wanted to improve the morale and standards of the Arab officers in the force by sending them on courses in Britain, which the Foreign Office agreed to pay for out of its technical assistance budget. By 1967, several Bahrainis were attending the British police academy in Hendon and the British Army's Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Parsons was not sure whether this was the most sagacious policy:

For the new intake of officers into the Police it would be better to have officers promoted from the ranks rather than playboys from the Ruling Family who had been accepted at Mons or Sandhurst for political reasons and had either failed or had been allowed to drift through without doing any work in order to avoid the embarrassment of the sack.<sup>723</sup>

Despite the purchase of a further tranche of armoured vehicles and a second helicopter, Parsons warned against unrestrained optimism:

We must clearly not be deceived by these improvements into thinking that everything in the garden is lovely. Although the Bahrain State Police is probably better in all respects than it has been over the past eighteenth months, or even longer, there is still plenty wrong – there is a number of incompetent British officers still to be removed, the relationship of Shaikh Mohammad to the force leaves much to be desired.<sup>724</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> On 5 March 1966 Special Branch officer Bob Langdale (his brother William was also in the Bahraini Special Branch) was travelling in his car with his wife and daughter between Jufair and Manama when they were shot at by assailants. A week later when Langdale and his Jordanian assistant, Mohsen, got into respective cars at their respective houses their vehicles blew up. Langdale lost a leg; Mohsen sustained back injuries. Derek Franklin, *A Pied Cloak: Memoirs of a Colonial Police (Special Branch) Officer* (London: Janus Publishing, 2006), p. 146.

<sup>721</sup> TNA FO 371/185352, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 14 March 1966.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> TNA FCO 8/553, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (FO), 'Bahraini Military Cadets,' 25 November 1967.

<sup>724</sup> TNA FO 371/185352, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 6 October 1966.

Tension in Bahrain heightened in June 1967 with the Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Large demonstrations were followed by attacks on the small Jewish community in Manama and on citizens of Persian heritage because Tehran was supplying Israel with oil. The Nasser-inspired Arab Nationalist Movement had been the biggest internal security threat in Bahrain throughout much of the 1960s. But support for this organisation fizzled out after Israel's rapid victory in the war destroyed Nasser's credibility.

In Qatar, the earlier accession issue between Shaikh Ahmad bin Ali and Shaikh Khalifah bin Hamad Al Thani, which dominated affairs in Qatar in 1958, had provided Britain with greater leverage to push for reforms in the Qatari security forces. When the Ruler, Shaikh Ali, visited London as a guest of the British Government in August 1958 his main preoccupation in discussions at the Foreign Office were the succession question and the military assistance that the British government would afford him in the event of an internal threat from within the ruling family. He asked whether Britain would support his son Shaikh Ahmad if Shaikh Khalifah opposed the succession. Although British officials replied that succession should be conducted by proper and traditional processes, they assured Shaikh Ali of Britain's readiness to assist him in the event of his inability to maintain law and order and to support him in the event of an attempt to overthrow his government by violence. This support, however, was conditional on his efforts to proceed resolutely with the task of preserving internal security and promoting good governance.<sup>725</sup> Whilst Shaikh Ali readily agreed to this stipulation, little attempt subsequent was made to put this into practice. Indeed, as a parting shot on his retirement in 1960, the Ruler's British adviser, Hancock, submitted an end-of-employment report in which he wrote candidly to the Ruler that there was little point in expanding the police if they were not given the authority to enforce the law.<sup>726</sup> Hancock was referring in particular to industrial strikes during which the Ruler had refused give his

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<sup>725</sup> These conclusions were incorporated in a personal letter to him from the Secretary of State, Selwyn Lloyd on 16 September 1958. TNA FO 371/140064, Duncan (Political Agent, Doha) to George Middleton (Political Resident) submitting a report on the affairs of Qatar during 1958 together with a chronological summary of events, 28 December 1958.

<sup>726</sup> For the final employment report by the Adviser can be found in: TNA FO 371/149005 G.M. Hancock, Adviser to the Government of Qatar to the Government of Qatar, 11 June 1960.

backing to the police. In June 1960, the Political Resident also remonstrated with the Ruler that he had not given the police the necessary authority or his backing to act, and, moreover, that police guards had in fact been withdrawn from essential installations during the trouble. Shaikh Ali, who the Political Resident judged to be teetering on the edge of abdication, asked the Political Resident to reaffirm the British commitment to come to his aid whilst at the same time he requested more arms and equipment from Britain for the police, which was still led by the privately employed British national, Ronald Cochrane.<sup>727</sup>

Tired of the burdens of governing and suffering from poor health, Shaikh Ali finally stepped down as ruler towards the end of 1960. When the acting Political Resident, M.C.G. Man, entered the main courtyard of Rayan Palace on 23 October 1960 to oversee the succession of the Ruler's son he observed:

[. . .] what looked like a great white wave surged in from the left and came to rest in front of [Man's] car – this was a solid phalanx of Shaikh Ahmed's retainers in flowing white robes complete with bandoliers, rifles and revolvers, headed by Shaikh Ahmed himself in a back abba with the ever-present [Ronald] Cochrane at his side. At the same moment there emerged from the main majlis on the right Shaikh Ali himself at the head of a smaller wave of warriors.<sup>728</sup>

Concerned about what Shaikh Khalifah and his supporters might do next, Shaikh Ali appealed to the acting Political Resident for British support and to legitimise his son's accession. The next morning the leading members of the Al Thani family swore allegiance to Shaikh Ahmad in a ceremony watched over by a combined honour guard of Royal Marines (landed from HMS *Loch Ruthven* for this purpose) and the Qatari Police. Tellingly, Ronald Cochrane stood at the new Ruler's side during the proceedings.

Britain hoped that Shaikh Ahmad would give the Qatari security forces more backing than his father had. The early signs were positive. By the end of 1960 Qatar had put in orders with British manufacturers for mortars, heavy machine-guns and armoured vehicles. Such arms would make the Qatari security forces the strongest power on the peninsula. But the new Ruler

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<sup>727</sup> TNA FO 371/149005, Record of talks between the Political Resident and the Ruler of Qatar held in the Ruler's house at Aley on 9 and 10 June 1960.

<sup>728</sup> TNA FO 371/149172, M.C.G. Man (Acting Political Resident) to R.A. Beaumont (Foreign Office), 25 October 1960.

seemed intent on building up a military force rather than an effective police for internal coercion, for Qatar later enquired about purchasing anti-tank weapons and Jet Provost aircraft from Britain. Whilst Britain broadly supported the growth of the British-led Qatari security forces, especially by helping Qatar hire suitable British police officers, the Foreign Office was cautious about British aerospace firms trying to sell attack aircraft to Qatar. At an Arms Working Party held in Whitehall in April 1961, the Foreign Office put forward its position:

[. . .] the Qatari Government should not be encouraged to spend money on an air force for which they have no real need. Apart from the strain on Qatari financial resources, however, there may well be undesirable repercussions elsewhere in the Persian Gulf to their purchasing aircraft, particularly in Bahrain, Qatar's rival, whose finances are also stretched.<sup>729</sup>

By March 1961, the security force had become, in the words of the Political Agent in Qatar, J.C. Moberly, 'more an armed gendarmerie than a police force as we understand it.' Its tasks had developed from normal police functions to internal security and frontier guard duties more usually carried out by an army. Moberly regarded the armoured squadron in particular as 'a Qatari army in embryo.'<sup>730</sup> Indeed, the force was now armed with light and medium machine-guns, mortars, field guns, and an assortment of Land Rovers and armoured vehicles.<sup>731</sup>

In contrast to Shaikh Ali, Shaikh Ahmad saw this armed force as a means of protecting his position, placing it under his personal control. On balance, Britain was pleased that the Ruler gave the security forces greater attention and resources. Along with Kuwait and Bahrain Qatar became a significant oil producer among the Gulf shaikhdoms. Britain's aim was for the local government to have the wherewithal to keep order to maintain the flow of oil.

Taking a similar approach to the Ruler of Bahrain and the Sultan of Muscat, Shaikh Ahmad insisted on employing British officers to command and

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<sup>729</sup> TNA DEFE 7/1303, D.F. Ballantyne (Foreign Office) to R. Anderson (Ministry of Aviation), 26 April 1961.

<sup>730</sup> TNA FO 371/156989, J. C. Moberly (Political Agent, Doha) to H.B. Walker, (Foreign Office) 23 March 1961.

<sup>731</sup> The armoured vehicles consisted of four Ferrets, four Saladins, four Saracens, and four Daimlers. Ibid.



run his force, confiding to Political Agent Moberly on more than one occasion that he did not trust Arab officers.<sup>732</sup> Indeed, 19 out of the 37 officers of the armed police were British.<sup>733</sup> Under Shaikh Ahmad, Ronald Cochrane, the British commander of the re-styled Public Security Department became ever-more indispensable; nearly always found at the ruler's side, Cochrane oversaw the armed police as well as its semi-autonomous offshoots (the mobile regiment and guard regiment) – all in all, 1,401 men. The post of Police Commander went to R.G. Lock, another former colonial police officer who had served in the British Empire – in this case, Palestine, Nigeria, and Cyprus.

If Britain believed that the enlarged police force now carried the full confidence of the Ruler, then this was shattered following disturbances in Doha in February and April 1963 that coincided with the Iraqi revolution and the calls for Arab unity. Retainers of a minor shaikh shot demonstrators during the night of 19/20 April, hardening feeling against the ruling family and precipitating a general strike.<sup>734</sup> The Ruler came to see the Political Agent on 21 April, telling him that he had little confidence in the loyalty of the security forces. Would Britain stand by the 1958 commitment to come to his aid if they mutinied, he asked?<sup>735</sup> As in Bahrain, London invested the Political Resident with the authority to use British troops in Qatar should British interests be threatened. On 22 April, Britain put the Parachute Regiment battalion in Bahrain on standby to intervene in Qatar and positioned a landing craft loaded with four tanks and supporting vehicles off Doha should the paratroopers get into difficulty.<sup>736</sup> When it looked as though a general breakdown of order in Qatar was a very real possibility, Luce had recommended that Britain stand by the Ruler militarily; however, any future help was conditional on the Ruler making reforms, including to the armed police.<sup>737</sup> In a further round of talks between the Political Resident and the Ruler in June 1963 the latter intimated that he would

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<sup>732</sup> Ibid.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> TNA FO 371/168851, Philip McKearney (Political Agent, Qatar) to Bahrain Residency, 20 April 1963.

<sup>735</sup> TNA FO 371/168851, Philip McKearney to Foreign Office, 21 April 1963

<sup>736</sup> TNA FO 371/168851, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 21 April 1963.

<sup>737</sup> TNA FO 371/168851, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 23 April 1963.

strengthen his own forces if he could no longer count on the 1958 assurance. Rather than support this initiative, Luce believed that:

Further, and probably extensive, expenditure on his police and army [the armoured squadron of the police] could only make the financial situation worse and is, I consider, quite unnecessary. Provided his present forces remain loyal, they together with the several hundreds of armed tribesmen whom the Ruler can call upon at very short notice (and did so last April) should be quite adequate to deal with any purely internal trouble. Equally, if the loyalty of his forces were in doubt (which Cochrane would deny) then there could be no possible advantage in strengthening them.<sup>738</sup>

Because the armed police lacked any association with Qatari society, there was significant hostility towards it from the local population. There were only three Qatari officers and hardly any Qataris in the other ranks. The officers were predominantly British and Pakistanis and the men were a variety of other Arabs (Yeminis and Hadhramis). Cochrane had recently been recruiting Bedouin from the Northern Arabian tribes. In his eyes, they were good material and not too politically minded.<sup>739</sup> British representatives were concerned that the Qatari government was a long way from holding a monopoly of coercion in the peninsula. A large part of the problem was that Shaikh Khalifah and other members of the ruling family held their own stockpiles of weapons with which they armed their retainers. As the Political Agent observed:

Although I have no illusions as to the probable outcome, the Political Resident may wish to draw the Ruler's attention once more to the dangers of allowing any arms to be held by other members of his family. It is really too fantastic that every shaikh has his own armed force, but the only satisfactory solution, their complete disarming, is to my mind most unlikely to be achieved.<sup>740</sup>

Lacking confidence in the ability of his armed police to keep order, and in Britain's guarantee to come to his aid if they failed in this task, the Ruler requested in 1964 to purchase 1,500 rifles from Britain. When it came to internal security, he said he did not want 'to put all his eggs in one basket.' Instead, the

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<sup>738</sup> TNA FO 371/168885, William Luce (Political Resident) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 26 June 1963.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid, Minute by T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 'Qatar,' 21 June 1963.

<sup>740</sup> TNA FO 371/168857, Philip McKearney (Political Agent, Doha) to J.R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 3 June 1963.

Ruler wished to retain the ability to call on, and arm, loyal Bedouin should there be any doubt as to the loyalty of Qatar's security forces.<sup>741</sup> For Britain, Qatar could best achieve this by developing an efficient and professional armed police, not by arming ill-trained tribal allies with modern rifles. In response to criticism from British representatives about this policy, the Ruler brought up recent events in Zanzibar and Tanganyika, where, he noted, Britain did not intervene on behalf of the rulers. Accepting that Shaikh Ahmad could obtain rifles from the Saudis if he wished and that internal security was his own responsibility, Britain issued a 'No Objection Certificate' for the import of British rifles.<sup>742</sup>

Britain's confidence in the Qatari police took a further dip in 1967. The Political Agent in Qatar, Boyle, recorded the reactions of the force to events elsewhere in the Arab World.

[A]fter Egypt's defeat and Nasser's threatened resignation, a near-mutiny broke out in the Fort Headquarters, brought on by emotional strain. Firm action and personal intervention by the Deputy Ruler averted an outbreak, but he had a severe shock, and the result was that a large section of unstable Yemini and Yafei soldiers were weeded out and returned to their own countries.<sup>743</sup>

When violence broke out during the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, the police were unable to deal with a demonstration outside the Political Agency. A number of windows were smashed and it took the Ruler's Bedouin armed retainers to restore calm.

## **5.4 Policing in the Trucial States, 1961-67**

Unlike Bahrain and Qatar, none of the Trucial States were producing oil at the turn of the decade. This meant that, except for a few of the coastal towns (notably Dubai), the Trucial States were largely undeveloped. By the late 1950s, Dubai and Abu Dhabi had police forces functioning in the main towns, but for

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<sup>741</sup> TNA FO 371/174660, James Craig (Foreign Office) to John R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 13 January 1964; Ibid, J. R. Rich (Bahrain Residency) to Philip McKearney (Political Agent, Qatar), 16 January 1964; and Ibid, Philip McKearney (Political Agent, Qatar) to John R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 22 January 1964.

<sup>742</sup> TNA FO 371/174660, Philip McKearney (Political Agent, Qatar) to John R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 22 January 1964.

<sup>743</sup> TNA FCO 8/721 R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar), 'Review of Events in Qatar, 1967', to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 3 January 1968.

the most part responsibility for internal security in the Trucial States, and especially the smaller northern shaikhdoms (Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah), belonged to the British-run TOS. The Foreign Office, however, sent a colonial police expert, Robert Waggitt, to appraise policing arrangements in the Trucial States in 1961. Although the rulers of the northern shaikhdoms kept armed retainers (*askars*), and could appeal to Political Resident for assistance from the TOS, Waggitt recommended that Britain set up a police force to cover these five states.<sup>744</sup> Resident Luce, did not judge a police force necessary for the northern shaikhdoms, arguing to the Foreign Office in August 1961 that:

Given the size and very unsophisticated nature of the five smaller Trucial Shaikhdoms in question, and the absence of anything more than large villages, there is little to warrant the creation of a special force of the kind envisaged by Waggitt. The incidence of crime is inconsiderable and the maintenance of law and order in each of these Shaikhdoms by the authority of the Ruler backed up by his "Askars" [armed retainers] continues to be reasonably satisfactory. In other words I see no need to have policemen "on the beat" in any of these Shaikhdoms.<sup>745</sup>

Luce did believe, however, that the TOS should employ a police expert at its headquarters to command a small mobile police unit of about 35 men.<sup>746</sup> Would the War Office pay half the cost of such police wing, particularly as it would not be performing a military role? To advance Luce's case, the Residency suggested quoting *The Trucial Oman Levies Regulation (King's Regulation No. 1 1951)* which made it explicate that police work remained the primary function of the Scouts and the *raison d'être* for its existence.<sup>747</sup> Plans to create a police wing within the TOS for policing the towns of the northern shaikhdoms took form with the hiring of Major Jack Briggs from the Qatari armed police. Briggs did not think that a police unit following the mobile patrolling methods of the TOS would

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<sup>744</sup> Until 1961, the Political Agent based in Dubai was responsible for all the Trucial states, but was also assisted by a Political Officer in Abu Dhabi after 1957. Reflecting Abu Dhabi's growing importance this post was upgraded to a full Agency in 1961.

<sup>745</sup> TNA FO 371/157062, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 5 August 1961.

<sup>746</sup> Hawley diary entries show that he devoted a great deal of his time in April and May to this matter. Hawley (2007), p. 307.

<sup>747</sup> TNA FO 371/163046, M.C.G Man (Bahrain Residency) to A.R. Walmsley (Foreign Office), 10 March 1962.

work. As prevention of crime was the main aim of any police force, Briggs believed that only stationing men in the towns would be of benefit.<sup>748</sup> For this to happen, the TOS police wing concept would require the backing of the local rulers in the northern shaikhdoms. Towards that end, Briggs toured the area in the summer of 1963, spending time with each leading shaikh.<sup>749</sup> Not all the local rulers supported the police wing concept – let alone the TOS as a whole. Shaikh Saqr of Sharjah, for example, thought the TOS ‘were of no value to him and were intended only to protect Britain’s oil interest.’<sup>750</sup> Ultimately, the rulers did not assent to the TOS police wing operating in their towns. The scheme suffered a setback which it never really recovered from.<sup>751</sup> With no immediate work for him to do, Briggs accepted an invitation from the Ruler of Dubai in May 1965 to become the commandant of the police there.

Britain decided to switch course and decided help each shaikhdom develop its own police when asked for assistance. For instance, the British agreed to Shaikh Saqr of Ras al-Khaimah’s request to acquire 50 rifles for a proposed police force and supported the proposal that his son, Shaikh Khalid, visit British police establishments to learn more about policing methods. The Political Agent for the Trucial States thought that agreeing ‘would pay a dividend’ as it ‘is essential that the Ruler should feel he has our positive backing in launching his police force.’<sup>752</sup> When the unruly Habus tribe occupied Ras al-Khaimah’s municipal water rig in May 1965, the TOS joined the recently established Ras al-Khaimah Police to confront the group. Even so, Shaikh Saqr reverted back to mobilising four hundred tribesmen to the scene as he did not want the TOS to intervene against his own subjects, even rebellious ones. British support for the fledgling Ras al-Khaimah Police cooled when it was suspected that Shaikh Saqr was using the establishment of a police force as veil behind which to arm his tribesmen with modern rifles. Distrust of Shaikh

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<sup>748</sup> Account by Jack Briggs taken from Mann (1994), p. 147.

<sup>749</sup> TNA FO 371/168935, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to James Craig (Political Agent, Trucial States), 19 September 1963.

<sup>750</sup> TNA FO 371/179916, Hugh Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States) to William Luce (Political Resident), 15 May 1965.

<sup>751</sup> Mann (1994), p. 158.

<sup>752</sup> TNA FO 371/179941, Hugh Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States) to J.R. Rich (Bahrain Residency), 8 May 1965.

Saqr's motives was fuelled by his association and with open support for the Cairo-sponsored Arab League. Britain thought he needed close watching.<sup>753</sup>

The two most powerful shaikhdoms of the Trucial States already had established police forces (Dubai Police was formed in 1957 and the Abu Dhabi Police in 1958). The Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Shakhbut Al Nahyan, had played with the idea of a small police force as early as 1955, even putting several of his *askars* through a TOS-run training course. From their inceptions, British officers commanded both the Abu Dhabi and Dubai police forces but with very little direct involvement from Britain. Equipped with a hodgepodge selection of vehicles, as well as a small naval launch, Shaikh Shakhbut treated the Abu Dhabi Police 'very much as his own private army,' which meant, according to British police expert Waggitt, who inspected the force in 1961, that '[e]very item of expenditure on the force has to be personally approved by the Ruler, even for such minor items as having a P.C.'s [police constable] boots repaired.'<sup>754</sup> When later Britain hoped that the Trucial States would form a joint police force, Britain held little hope that the Shaikh Shakhbut would consider even for a moment any form of amalgamation.<sup>755</sup>

When Shakhbut decided to form a police force, he had asked Britain to find a suitable officer to run it. Britain's candidate, Cosby Stokes, who had experience in the Indian and Sudanese police forces, did not last long.<sup>756</sup> Whilst Shaikh Shakhbut persistently challenged British representatives, he raised no initial objections to Britain's selection of Stokes.<sup>757</sup> Soon after his arrival in Abu Dhabi, however, Shaikh Shakhbut terminated his employment. So although Britain could recommend police commanders, the rulers had final say on whether their employment continued or not. Even in Dubai where the Foreign Office paid the salary of the Commandant, Peter Lorimer, he answered ultimately to the Ruler. On 17 May 1965, the Ruler, whose relations with

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<sup>753</sup> TNA FO 371/179905, H. Phillips (Bahrain Residency) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 18 September, 1965.

<sup>754</sup> TNA FO 371/157061, Report on Proposal to form a Police Force for Trucial States, 1961.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Hawley (2007), pp. 120-21.

<sup>757</sup> Uzi Rabi, 'Oil Politics and Tribal Rulers in Eastern Arabia: The Reign of Shakhbut (1928-1966),' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (May, 2006), pp. 42-3

Lorimer had been strained for some time, sacked him.<sup>758</sup> Despite the disaster with Stokes, Shaikh Shakhbut told the Political Agent in the Trucial States, Donald Hawley, that he would still accept the Foreign Office's recommendation, William (Bill) Edge, for a replacement.<sup>759</sup> After a year commanding the Abu Dhabi Police, Edge complained to the Political Agent in a confidential note that salaries were appallingly low (120 rupees a month, which was 30 rupees lower than a labourer) and never paid on time, that supplies were never ordered, and that guards on duty at the palace were denied water and food. Although Shaikh Shakhbut agreed to increase the police to 400 men, Edge was finding it difficult to obtain recruits because of the poor conditions. 'It appears that the Ruler is a lonely and suspicious person, he does not trust anyone . . . his name is a password amongst the people as a miser'.<sup>760</sup> The police's inadequacies were more than trifling matter for Britain.

Labour violence in May 1963 at Abu Dhabi's oil facilities provided stark illustration of the ineffectiveness of the police. The shaikhdом's growing wealth had made Abu Dhabi attractive for workers from other Arab countries, many of whom brought Arab nationalist and revolutionary ideas with them to the oil field. The Political Resident in Bahrain and Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, Hugh Boustead, impressed on the Ruler the seriousness of the situation and his responsibility for maintaining law and order. The Political Resident told him that 'if he and his police are unable to protect the lives and property of foreigners under our jurisdiction we [Britain] shall be compelled to do so.' Indeed, units of the TOS were readied and were standing by for this purpose.<sup>761</sup> Commenting unfavourably on the police, the American oil workers at the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company camps stated emphatically that they would not stay and work unless security improved. Boustead advised Shakhbut that he must have more experienced police officers who 'would give Abu Dhabi the proper kind of training, in particular for security duties, generally, and when strikes got out of hand.' Shakhbut agreed to Boustead's recommendation to bring in a British

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<sup>758</sup> TNA FO 371/179941, R.N. Posnett (Foreign Office) to R. Langley (Ministry of Overseas Development), 3 June 1965.

<sup>759</sup> Edge took up the position in March 1961.

<sup>760</sup> TNA FO 371/163069, Confidential note by William Edge (Commandant of Abu Dhabi Police) to Abu Dhabi Political Agency, 23 March, 1962.

<sup>761</sup> TNA FO 371/168962, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 30 May 1963.

police training officer from Bahrain, as well as a further British NCO and three Arab sergeants from the TOS for three months.<sup>762</sup> Duncan Slater at the Political Agency in Abu Dhabi believed that a British officer from Bahrain could be a great opportunity to expand British influence in the Abu Dhabi Police. 'As I see it,' Slater wrote,

beyond our immediate objective of giving the Abu Dhabi Police some training in riot drill, we ought to be looking for someone who, in Edge's absence (he was on leave), will show Shakhbut what a real and efficient police officer is like, and how effective he can be. It ought to be someone who can do a disproportionate amount of good in a short period of time. The Ruler will then be readier to agree to the appointment of other British officers in due course, to get rid of Edge, so that our ultimate main objective, that of radically improving the Abu Dhabi Police, will be furthered.<sup>763</sup>

The Resident's expectations that the labour unrest in 1963 would encourage Shakhbut to seek more British support for the police proved a miscalculation.<sup>764</sup> The British officer loaned from the Bahrain State Police, Mr. Parrett, tried to set up a riot squad in Abu Dhabi but had his work frustrated at every turn. British officials blamed the Ruler and Bill Edge for whom they had a growing distrust. Hugh Boustead in particular wanted Edge replaced with a new British commandant, but accepted that this would be difficult as it was accepted that Edge had Shakhbut's ear.<sup>765</sup> Edge would later be involved in secretly planning for setting up a military force for the Ruler.

Unlike the Abu Dhabi Police, Britain valued the Dubai Police from its inception, especially its role in intercepting mines and arms coming through its port and destined for insurgents in Oman. Local intelligence sources also believed rebels were using Dubai for storing landmines and as a safe haven.<sup>766</sup> The ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Rashid Al Maktoum, ordered his British police

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<sup>762</sup> TNA FO 371/168951, J.E.H. Boustead (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to Sir William Luce (Political Resident), 2 July, 1963.

<sup>763</sup> TNA FO 371/168951, Duncan Slater (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi) to William Luce (Political Resident), 2 July, 1963.

<sup>764</sup> TNA FO 371/174719, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 29 July 1964.

<sup>765</sup> TNA FO 371/168951, J.E.H. Boustead (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency), 23 September, 1963.

<sup>766</sup> Despite their efforts, Omani rebels supporting Imam Ghalib killed three TOS soldiers after their three-ton truck drove over a landmine on the road between Dubai and Buraimi in 1959.



commandant, Peter Lorimer, to devise a scheme for keeping not only Dubai but also all of the Trucial States clear of arms smuggling.<sup>767</sup> The proliferation and use of landmines continued to be of concern for British interests in Trucial Oman.<sup>768</sup> The extent of the problem was brought home on 8 April 1961 when a bomb planted by Omani terrorists exploded on the British India Steam Navigation Company ship, MV *Dara*, off the coast of Dubai killing 238 out of 819 passengers.<sup>769</sup> Britain's representatives called on London to do more to support the Dubai Police.

Although half of the population of the Trucial States resided in Dubai, the police force numbered little over 100 in 1962. Britain subsidised the police budget on the grounds that majority of those subject to British jurisdiction in the Trucial States (mostly the 5,000 Indians and Pakistanis) lived in Dubai town. British officials thought the British contribution, which covered the salary of Peter Lorimer, gave Britain 'an influence within the force out of all proportion to the cost.' When the Ruler stated his aim to expand the force, the Political Agent, James Craig, argued Britain should assist by increasing its financial subsidy.<sup>770</sup> 'The town has grown immensely busier, richer, and more sophisticated,' Craig wrote to the Residency in February 1962.<sup>771</sup> In his appeal for more British support, Craig remarked that Abu Dhabi, which had a total population one quarter of Dubai's and a town population one-twelfth, had a police force three times that of Dubai. Continuing with comparisons, he noted that 'Qatar's population is only slightly larger than Dubai's but it has eighteen hundred policemen – nearly fifteen times as many [as Dubai].' The Political Resident's initial rejection of increasing the British subsidy did not deter Craig. The Political

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<sup>767</sup> Diary notes of conversation between Shaikh Rashid and the Political Agent Trucial States, Donald Hawley, in Hawley (2007), p. 178.

<sup>768</sup> On 11 April 1961, a camel triggered a mine at Tawi Husn. TOS intelligence officers believed that Shaikh Ali bin Rashid of Ajman planted the mine. Shaikh Ali was apparently hunting in the area with a Land Rover. The tracks at the scene of the explosion were believed to be his.

<sup>769</sup> The Political Agent, Donald Hawley, speculated that the bomb had been timed to go off at Muscat, but bad weather had kept the *Dara* at Dubai. Hawley (2007), pp. 287-88. See also: TNA FO 371/ 157062, A. J. Clift (Treasury) to E.F. Given (Foreign Office), 14 July 1961.

<sup>770</sup> TNA FO 371/163069, James Craig (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.C.G. Man (Bahrain Residency), 6 February 1962.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*

Agent picked up his theme again in early 1963.<sup>772</sup> Craig's arguments on the issue are worth including in full. 'I need not remind Your Excellency,' Craig wrote to the Resident, Sir William Luce, in January 1963,

[. . .] of the fact that HMG have in recent years largely accepted responsibility for the internal security of the Trucial States; that throughout most of the other states their security is dependent in the Trucial Oman Scouts which cost us far more per head than the Dubai Police and for which Her Majesty's Government pay every penny; and that a special wing of the Trucial Oman Scouts is about to be formed which will carry the police duties in five of the seven States and for which, again, Her Majesty's Government will bear the sole financial responsibility. No one knows better than Your Excellency the extent and the closeness of the cooperation which the Dubai Police affords to this Agency, to the Residency in Bahrain, to the Trucial Oman Scouts and to Her Majesty's Armed Forces in the area. There can be no doubt that the help we have had from the Dubai Police in combating the Omani terrorists has been invaluable – far more zealous, certainly, and wholehearted than from any other police force except that of the target area, Muscat itself.<sup>773</sup>

Craig's entreaty to the Residency worked; the proposal to increase Britain's contribution to the Dubai Police was given the backing of the Resident.<sup>774</sup>

Britain did not view the dangers to the Trucial States purely through the lens of Omani rebels however. From the mid-1960s, British officials increasingly warned of the coming dangers to the area from Arab nationalist ideologies which sought to discredit the existing governments of the Gulf by labelling them reactionary and imperialist stooges.<sup>775</sup> The cockpit of Arab nationalist criticism of Britain was Cairo and the mouthpiece was Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who used his elaborate propaganda machine to push anti-British sentiment.<sup>776</sup> In May 1966, the Political Agent in the Trucial States gave his assessment of the internal security situation for the coming two years. He concluded that the area (the report did not encompass Abu Dhabi in the states

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<sup>772</sup> Ibid, M.C.G. Man (Bahrain Residency) to James Craig (Political Agent, Trucial States), 9 February 1962.

<sup>773</sup> TNA FO 371/168951, James Craig (Political Agent, Trucial States) to Sir William Luce (Political Resident), 3 January, 1963.

<sup>774</sup> TNA FO 371/168951, J.P. Tripp (Bahrain Residency) to E.F. Given (Foreign Office), 9 January, 1963.

<sup>775</sup> Bismark (2013), p. 69.

<sup>776</sup> See for example Laura James, *Nassar at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

under review) was 'ripe for subversion and singularly ill-equipped to undertake counter-subversive action.' The only local counter-subversion resources were negligible, limited to the Intelligence Officers of the TOS and Jack Briggs and his assistant in the Dubai Police. 'Major Briggs, with immense effort, has organised a force in Dubai which by his own assessment can only be described as elementary,' the Political Agent contended. Elsewhere there was nothing 'except feudal levies,' which were called out ad hoc and not a useful tool in dealing with the security problem, his report warned.<sup>777</sup> The Political Agent identified Dubai and Sharjah as the focal points for agitation and recommended setting up a British-led Special Branch in Dubai (as well as adding another British policeman to the Dubai Police) and establishing a regular police force of 50 men for Sharjah commanded by a British officer with an Arab officer assisting. Though the report proposed that the Ruler of Sharjah, Shaikh Khalid Al-Qasimi (Shaikh Saqr was deposed in 1965, see below), pay for most of the police, the Political Agent believed that Britain should select, and pay for, two officers 'to ensure that the Ruler did not, left to his own devices, make unsuitable appointments.' Other recommendations included forming a Special Branch in the Police Wing of the TOS to cover the five smaller Trucial States and to increase the number of Desert Intelligence Officers recruited by London from two to five.<sup>778</sup>

The Resident agreed that the situation as he saw it in mid-1966 was cause for alarm. In the British government's eyes, the primary responsibility for dealing with the forecasted increased threats to stability rested with the local state police forces, where they existed, backed throughout by the TOS. Yet the only local police force considered by Britain to be worth its powder and shot was in Dubai. And even then, Jack Briggs, its British commandant, had little confidence in its reliability. Voicing his opinion in November 1966, Jack Briggs wrote:

Anyone who has ever served in locally enlisted Forces anywhere in the world must have questioned the loyalty of his men at some time or another. The Dubai Police Force is, like all other Police Forces in the Gulf to a greater or lesser extent, a mercenary force. There are a

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<sup>777</sup> TNA FO 1016/851, Report by Hugh Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'The Internal Security Situation in the Trucial States (less Abu Dhabi) in 1966/68', c. early May 1966. Report endorsed with minor amendments by the MCC (PG).

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

number of so-called Dubai subjects in the Force but these are either Bedouin or of Iranian or Baluch parentage. The Rulers are all against having their own subjects in their police forces and armies and prefer to rely on mercenaries. Personally I have had many doubts in the past about how most of these men, and particularly those from the South Arabian Federation and the Yemen, would act if committed to action involving the use of force by the police against persons demonstrating for some Arab Nationalist, or anti-imperialist, cause. This happened last March [1965], in Bahrain and the Force showed no sign of cracking, apart from one or two of the Bahraini officers.<sup>779</sup>

The Political Resident judged the Abu Dhabi Police to still be 'notoriously ineffective,' and Britain could not count on Ras al-Khaimah's 80 ill-trained policemen largely because the political reliability of the Ruler, Shaikh Saqr, was suspected. The rulers of the four other shaikhdoms (Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain and Fujairah) possessed nothing beyond a handful of armed retainers. Sympathy for the Arab League in the northern Trucial States worried Britain. The rulers of Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman and Umm al-Quwain were meeting daily in May-June 1965 to discuss this issue; Britain expected them to apply to join the Arab League and fretted that Dubai and Fujairah could follow suit.<sup>780</sup> Britain viewed the Arab League's attention towards Trucial States as a Nasserite scheme to undermine its position in the area. Britain later helped in the deposition of Shaikh Saqr as the Ruler of Sharjah in 1965 by his family largely because of his active support for an Arab League development office in the Trucial States.<sup>781</sup> British officials had little doubt that Saqr's sympathies lay with Cairo rather than with Britain.<sup>782</sup> On 22 June 1965, the Resident, Sir William Luce, reported to London that Shaikh Saqr was preparing passports for

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<sup>779</sup> TNA FO 1016/852, Jack Briggs (Dubai Police) to D.A. Roberts (Political Agency, Trucial States), 'Loyalty of Locally Enlisted Forces', 9 November 1966.

<sup>780</sup> TNA FO 371/179754, William Luce (Political Resident) to Stewart Crawford (Foreign Office), 25 January 1965. See also: Helene Von Bismarck, 'A Watershed in our Relations with the Trucial States': Great Britain's Policy to Prevent the Opening of an Arab League Office in the Persian Gulf in 1965,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan. 2011), p. 14; and Greame H. Wilson, *Saqr: Fifty Years and More* (London: Media Prima, 2007), pp. 197-99.

<sup>781</sup> In late May 1965, the rulers of Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Umm al-Quwain and Ajman were believed to be meeting daily to formulate a joint policy towards Britain and the question of the Arab League. Shaikh Rashid of Dubai told British officials that the four had agreed on a policy of ending the treaty relations with Britain, asking the UAR to act as a protecting power, and accepting contraband arms from the Soviet Union. The last rumour was considered dubious; the first two were taken serious by the Residency. See in particular Bismarck (2013), pp. 135-6.

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*

Arab League visitors. The following evening, leading members of the ruling family handed the Deputy Resident a letter calling for the Ruler to stand down. On the morning of the 24 June, the Deputy Political Resident summoned Shaikh Saqr to the Political Agency in Dubai to inform him of his family's wish to replace him with Shaikh Khalid and to instruct him to leave the country immediately.

The Political Resident warned his subordinates that a strong case was needed if the Foreign Office was to be persuaded to bankroll further British police officers for nascent police forces in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. In May 1966, the Political Agency in Dubai picked what it thought was the strongest line of argument to be delivered to London:

It is considerably more in the interests of HMG than the Ruler of Sharjah that the State Police Force is raised and trained and run in an efficient way right from the start. If HMG pay the commander's salary it is liable to have considerably more influence over the Police Force than otherwise. At this stage this seems desirable. It is pertinent to point out that where a state such as Ras al-Khaimah has been left to remit and pay its own police officers, the first three officers to be recruited are all Egyptian-trained. We do not want this in Sharjah.<sup>783</sup>

When asked on 2 August 1966 whether he would accept a British officer to command his police, the Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah replied that he would do so without hesitation. Because Ras al-Khaimah was regarded by the Political Agency as one of the most likely places for hostile forces to infiltrate the area, a British officer was considered as useful as in Dubai and Sharjah.<sup>784</sup> The Residency agreed, adding that it was also important to get Shaikh Saqr back onside with Britain after his support for the Arab League in 1965 led to a break down in relations.

Against the backdrop of a shrinking British economy, financial authority was granted to pay for a deputy commandant to support Jack Briggs in Dubai; for a new British commandant in Sharjah; for four Special Branch officers (two for Dubai and two for the TOS police wing); and, lastly, for a British officer to head up the Ras al-Khaimah Police. The Foreign Office picked colonial police

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<sup>783</sup> TNA FO 1016/851, Extract of Roger Horrell's comments in Local Intelligence Committee, Trucial States, Minutes, 'Internal Security Paper,' 3 May 1966.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

officers for these positions (Trevor Bevan for Ras al-Khaimah, Bob Burns for Sharjah, and Jack Humphreys for Dubai).<sup>785</sup> The Ruler of Sharjah, however, claimed he had no money for a police force. British officials suspected that his real concern was Cairo's reaction if a British officer commanded his force.<sup>786</sup>

In order to tackle subversion in all the protected states, Britain formed in 1966 a Persian Gulf Local Counter-Subversion Group and pushed for British commanders to head each police force so that there was a regular exchange of information up and down the coast.<sup>787</sup> The genesis of this information sharing group can be traced to December 1965 when the Residency coordinated the first meeting of the British police commandants from Bahrain, Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. In 1967, British commandants from Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah joined the annual conference for coordinating police activities, which came to be called the Committee of Police Arabian Gulf States.<sup>788</sup> Britain also paid for an intelligence bureau in 1967. Housed in the Sharjah Police fort and staffed by a British officer and clerk, the bureau held card indexes for 20,000 personalities of interest in the Gulf, as well as suspect shipping and business. As an additional measure, the Residency employed a Security Liaison Officer from the British Security Service's (MI5) counter-sabotage section. He visited all the Gulf states to make recommendations on protection of key points such as government buildings and oil installations.

## **5.5 Subsidy and Secondments: Britain and the SAF, 1961-67**

The 1958 'Exchange of Letters' and the 1960 'Agreed Minutes' together codified British influence over the development of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). In return for subsidising the defence budget, Britain had the right to undertake

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<sup>785</sup> Sheila Bevan, *The Parting Years: A British Family and the End of Empire* (London: Radcliffe Press, 2001), p. 235.

<sup>786</sup> TNA FO 1016/851, Political Agency (Trucial States) to Bahrain Residency, Bahrain, 3 November; and TNA FO 1016/852, Stewart Crawford (Bahrain Residency) to Foreign Office, 5 November 1966.

<sup>787</sup> TNA FO 371/163069, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to E.F. Given (Foreign Office), 1 November, 1962.

<sup>788</sup> The British police officers in attendance were: J. Bell (Bahrain); A.S. Barham (Abu Dhabi – d/commandant); J. Briggs (Dubai); R.G. Lock (Qatar); A.T. Bevan (RAK); J.I. Burns (Sharjah); Jack Briggs (Dubai Police); TNA FCO 8/96 R.G. Lock (Commandant, Qatar Police), Minutes of the Committee of Police Arabian Gulf States, Second Conference, Doha, 6-9 March, 1967; and Ibid, R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to H.G. Balfour-Paul (Political Resident), 15 March 1967.

annual inspections to ensure that the military was being structured along the lines of the 1960 Hope-Thompson recommendations. For Britain this was the route map that had to be followed. When the Sultan proposed buying armoured cars from Britain, for example, the Treasury replied that the subsidy money could not be used, as this equipment was not in the Hope-Thompson report.<sup>789</sup> It would be misleading to say that Britain was now in complete control, however. The Sultan could – and did on occasion – reject British candidates for command positions in the SAF.<sup>790</sup>

Britain continued to subsidize the SAF after the Jebel Akhdar campaign of 1957-9 because it believed that rebels in the Omani interior, funded and supported by Saudi Arabia, posed a current and future threat. Britain wanted to reduce the Sultan's dependence on British direct military support in controlling his territory. British combat units and the TOS on training visits to Oman in the early 1960s also assisted the SAF curtail dissidents in the Omani interior. Despite the exile of the principle rebel leaders, mine-laying in Oman continued after the seizure of Jebel Akhdar from the rebels in January 1959. Other developments at the time included placing the gendarmerie force that operated on the Batinah Coast onto a more formal footing and strengthening the intelligence apparatus. In addition, a British contract officer, Jasper Coates, was transferred from the gendarmerie force to the fledgling Sultan of Oman's Navy (SON) to turn it into a modern force capable of undertaking coastal patrol work to halt the import of mines and other weapons.

In mid-1961, the British Treasury was pressing to end the British-assisted expansion of the SAF. The Residency pushed back, arguing that because of continued rebel activity in the interior and with little hope of a settlement, there was the possibility of the SAF being unable to deal with a more general insurrection, thereby necessitating British involvement. 'Such intervention would be,' the Residency warned, 'costly and politically very undesirable.' Moreover, the Residency argued that the 'increased efficiency of the SAF has greatly reduced this possibility, and promises to do so still further, but any falling-off of

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<sup>789</sup> Hope-Thompson had judged that because of the British armoured car squadron at Sharjah, there was little need for the Sultan to have his own force of this type. TNA FO 371/156800, A.J. Clift (Treasury) to K. Jones (Foreign Office), 10 August 1961.

<sup>790</sup> In 1963, for example, the Sultan declined to accept the British nomination for a new commander of the NFR on the grounds that, being a Major and not a Lt. Col., he was not experienced enough.

this efficiency would, of course, have the opposite effect.<sup>791</sup> Even the Residency lost its patience when the Sultan cut his own financial contribution to the SAF by half in 1961-62 (from £40,000 to £20,000). What really irked British officials was that at the same time the Sultanate spent £20,000 building a house for Chauncy, the former Consul-General now privately employed as an adviser to the Sultan.<sup>792</sup>

In anticipation of an impending re-examination of the subsidy in 1963, the Foreign Office asked the Ministry of Defence to re-state Britain's strategic interests in Muscat and Oman. An earlier Cabinet review on this same question in 1960 declared that the air facilities at Masirah and Sharjah were indispensable for the defence of Kuwait. As instability in the Omani interior would affect either base, it remained crucial that Britain help the Sultan gain greater control over his territory. Not only did the British Chiefs of Staff believe that this thinking remained just as relevant in 1963, but that the expansion of Abu Dhabi's oil production and the increased military use of the airbase on Masirah Island since 1960 made continuing the assistance to the Sultan's military even more important than before.<sup>793</sup> The Treasury was unconvinced and steadfast in its desire to end the financial subsidy to the Sultan. The Ministry of Defence thought that the Treasury's thinking on this issue, and its more general attitude towards British overseas defence policy, was myopic:

Their [the Treasury's] whole approach to the provision of any money for defence purposes east of Suez [. . .] is governed by their determination to keep defence spending within 7% of the United Kingdom Gross National Product and to this end they are, in the high level review of our military dispositions east of Suez now being conducted as a result of the Defence Committee Meeting at Chequers on February 9, questioning the basis for our long term policy, commitments and dispositions in the Middle East theatre and, in anticipation of gaining their way, they are also trying to oppose any short or medium-term projects which can remotely be linked with defence anywhere east of Suez.<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>791</sup> TNA FO 371/156800, M.C.G. Man (Bahrain Residency) to K.H. Jones (Foreign Office), 29 July 1961.

<sup>792</sup> TNA FO 371/156801, J.F.S Phillips to K. Jones (Foreign Office), 'The Sultan's "additional" contribution to SAF for 1961/62', 9 August 1961.

<sup>793</sup> TNA FO 371/168691, Annex to CoS 145(63), 'British Strategic Interests in Muscat and Oman', 18 April 1963.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid, Minute by the Permanent Undersecretary's Department (Ministry of Defence), 'Review of the Muscat Subsidy: Note on Defence Aspects', 3 May 1963.



In contrast, the Ministry of Defence thought that furnishing money on the SAF was sound and might perhaps in the long run be *less* costly. The Permanent Undersecretary explained the ministry's reasoning in May 1963:

The Treasury's position is illogical since [. . .] one of the investments we can now make in the hope of eventually being enabled to reduce our defence expenditure overseas is the building up of friendly forces e.g. by training, secondment, loans and even, as here, in grants of aid.<sup>795</sup>

With great reluctance the Treasury agreed in 1963 to extend the subsidy for a further year. This was a relief to British officials who pointed to intelligence reports of 1964 that claimed that bands of Omani rebels were training in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria, and that a renewed campaign was around the corner. A rebellion when it came did not emerge in the interior but in the southern Dhofar province. All the same, Britain was drawn deeper into the Sultan's defence apparatus as a result of this new threat. The rebellion in the mountainous Dhofar province from the mid-1960s onwards demonstrated the Sultan's continued reliance on British succour. Handcuffed by the anti-colonial mood of the day, Britain flinched from overt military intervention. Instead the policy of building up the Sultan's own means of confronting the rebels was favoured.

A series of mine attacks around Salalah (the principal town in Dhofar Province and the site of a RAF base) in August 1964 had signalled the rumblings of the coming rebellion.<sup>796</sup> Figuring out a response to mine explosions between the airbase and the jetty, and on the oil company road to north, the RAF commander at RAF Salalah, the British Consul-General and the Resident all agreed that 'RAF flag-waving sorties over tribal territory' would be of little use in combating these attacks. Instead, British officials wanted the Sultan's small Dhofar Force to carry out patrolling with the support of the Sultan's air force to disrupt the planting of mines. The Sultan rejected this proposal leading British officials to conclude that the RAF contingent would have to be reinforced.<sup>797</sup> British representatives and military officers did not hold the SAF in high regard.

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<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> An RAF serviceman was killed in a lorry 14 August, three RAF vehicles destroyed and oil company camp attacked. There were multiple other incidents of arson and small explosions against oil infrastructure.

<sup>797</sup> TNA FO 371/174554, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to Foreign Office, 22 August 1964.

A Baluchi mutiny in the Northern Frontier Regiment in August 1963 hardened the opinion that the SAF were unreliable and that sub-standard British contract officers were holding back the development of the military. Britain's response was to increase the proportion of regular seconded officers to the SAF, cementing this policy in a 1964 agreement which committed Britain to provide 33 regular officers on loan. Words are often easier than deeds, and Britain struggled to produce these officers. According to the Sultan's Military Secretary, Pat Waterfield, this failure was 'a serious matter under present conditions particularly bearing in mind our added commitment in Dhofar and the uncertainty of rebel capabilities and intentions in Oman.'<sup>798</sup> Moreover, a further 15 British officers (on top of the promised 33) would be needed if the Sultan's third battalion of the SAF was established. The British Ministry of Defence's Director of Military Operations, who visited Muscat and Oman in 1965, told Waterfield that as the Sultanate was now higher up in British worldwide priorities it would be first on the list for secondments.<sup>799</sup> The reality was very different, as one senior official in the Foreign Office explained: 'It looks as though Brigadier Waterfield may have misunderstood what the Director of Military Operations said to him. The general situation with regard to the supply of British officers has not improved; if anything it has worsened.' The demand for secondments of British officers had been growing in the newly independent Commonwealth countries. The Foreign Office promised to keep the pressure on, but accepted that the Ministry of Defence could only provide perhaps one or two additional officers at most.<sup>800</sup>

The Sultan excluded the British-officered SAF units from taking an active role in the rebellion in the Dhofar province.<sup>801</sup> The Provosts and Beavers of the

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<sup>798</sup> TNA FO 371/179823, Brigadier Pat Waterfield (Military Secretary, Department of Defence, Muscat) to J.S.R. Duncan (Consul-General, Muscat), 29 June 1965.

<sup>799</sup> TNA FO 371/179823, Brigadier Pat Waterfield (Military Secretary, Department of Defence, Muscat) to J.S.R. Duncan (HBM's Consul General, Muscat), 30 October 1965; TNA FO 371/179823, D.C. Carden (British Consulate, Muscat) to William Luce (Political Resident), 30 October 1965.

<sup>800</sup> TNA FO 371/179823, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to William Luce (Political Resident), 19 November 1965.

<sup>801</sup> See: J.B. Kelly, 'Hadramaut, Oman, Dhufar: The Experience of Revolution,' *Middle East Studies*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (May 1976), pp. 213-230; J. E. Peterson, 'Britain and the Oman War: An Arabian Entanglement,' *Asian Affairs: Journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Oct. 1976), pp. 285-98; J. E. Peterson, 'Guerrilla Warfare and Ideological Confrontation in the Arabian Peninsula: The Rebellion in Dhufar,' *World Affairs*, Vol. 139, No. 4 (Spring, 1977), pp. 278-295. In

SOAF with their British contracted pilots, however, provided air support to the Sultan's small Dhofar Force in the area.<sup>802</sup> Deadly ambushes against several patrols in 1966 by the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF), as the rebels called themselves, followed by an attempt on the life of the Sultan by members of his own bodyguard brought into stark relief the unsuitability of the Dhofar Force and the pressing need for a new approach.<sup>803</sup> British officials considered this small Dhofar Force, consisting of a couple of hundred men plus armoured cars, inadequate to carry out operations against the DLF. After the attempt on the Sultan's life, slaves and ex-slaves were formed into a new unit, commanded by contract Pakistani officers. The Sultan also retained about 400 Omani *askars* in Dhofar from loyal Arab tribes. These untrained men and boys – their ages ranged from eight to 80 – provided their own rifles. They guarded the perimeter of RAF Salalah and provided an escort for the Sultan.<sup>804</sup>

Perturbed by the growing dissident activity in the vicinity of RAF Salalah, and holding little confidence in the Sultan's ability to do anything about it, Britain decided to fly in a detachment of the paratroopers based in Bahrain to defend the base.<sup>805</sup> The Sultan increased the SAF presence in Dhofar to three companies in early 1966, but this was not enough. Staging attacks from across the border in the East Aden Protectorate, the rebels had the initiative. 'If rebel attacks still prove difficult to deal with,' Sir William Luce surmised, the Sultan 'might have to consider seeking British help on the ground.'<sup>806</sup> In an effort to disrupt rebel bases across the border in the East Aden Protectorate, Britain launched Operation *Fate* in October 1966.<sup>807</sup>

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terms of a personal account from the period, see John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975* (Salisbury, UK, Michael Russell, 1982)

<sup>802</sup> Lee (1980), p. 265.

<sup>803</sup> Peterson (1986), p. 204.

<sup>804</sup> TNA FCO 8/572, Report by Major R.J.F. Brown (DIO Salalah), 'On Dhofar – March 1968', forwarded by the Joint Intelligence Staff, HQ British Forces Gulf, 31 March 1968.

<sup>805</sup> TNA FO 371/185365, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 14 March 1966.

<sup>806</sup> TNA FO 371/185365, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 6 March 1966. Suggested Re-draft of assessment of the situation for the JIC as agreed by the MCC (PG).

<sup>807</sup> British troops captured 22 suspected members of the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) in the cordon and search mission.

There was also fear at the time about a second front opening up in central Oman, and that rebels would attack oil infrastructure in the area.<sup>808</sup> To combat this threat, Britain wanted the Sultan to set up a regular police force and establish an intelligence unit (a Special Branch) for counter-subversion duties. The Sultan only really had the Oman Gendarmerie, with 14 officers and 411 men, which performed quasi-police duties along the land frontier with the Trucial States and along the Batinah Coast.<sup>809</sup> Beyond this force and the armed watchmen manning the gates and prison in Muscat, there was no police force to speak of. British police adviser, Mr. Turnball, argued that a Special Branch force could only function within the framework of an efficient police force – both had to be developed in tandem. Appreciating the financial and manpower constraints the Sultan faced, Turnball proposed in June 1965 that Muscat and Oman begin with a modest 150-man police force, concentrated in the capital Muscat. This, he proposed, could then grow to take over responsibility for policing the whole of Oman, including the oil installations.<sup>810</sup> Sultan Said, however, refused to allocate any funds for a police force. It was not until 1968 that the Sultan formed a town police for Muscat and hired a British police officer to command it.<sup>811</sup> In September 1966, the oil company, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), set up and paid for its own special police force to operate within the oil producing areas.<sup>812</sup>

In contrast to the proposed police force, the Sultan did wish to expand his military. He and his Military Secretary, Pat Waterfield, discussed their intention to expand the military with British officials. The Sultan wanted to purchase and deploy attack and light transport aircraft in Salalah to help the efforts against rebels. Britain hoped that a more capable air force in the Sultan's hands would reduce the likelihood of a request for direct intervention by the

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<sup>808</sup> TNA FO 371/185383, E.F. Henderson to T.F. Brenchley (FO), 'Security – Muscat and Oman', 9 July 1966.

<sup>809</sup> Commander was a former British police officer and several other officers also had policing experience. In addition the Oman Gendarmerie had a sea patrol comprising one small dhow commanded by Jasper Coates.

<sup>810</sup> TNA FO 371/179829, P.E. Turnball (Police Advisor) to Sultan Said bin Taimur enclosing report: 'Recommendations for Policing the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman', 21 June 1965.

<sup>811</sup> TNA FO 1016/791, D.G. Crawford (Consulate General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 'Annual Review for 1969', 30 December 1969.

<sup>812</sup> TNA FO 1016/765, D.C. Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Hugh Balfour-Paul (Bahrain Residency), 29 September 1966.

RAF.<sup>813</sup> But how the Sultan was to pay for expanding his military was another question.

According to a second set of 'Agreed Minutes' from 26 July 1965, the British declared that the financial subsidy to the SAF would be extended to the middle of 1967 but thereafter end for good. Whilst this would in effect release the Sultan from British supervision of his military, it was expected that he would still continue to request other forms of British military assistance.<sup>814</sup> The Consul-General, D.C Carden, thought it was 'virtually certain that [the Sultan] will ask for the continuation of help in the form of the secondment of officers and NCOs to his army, and possibly in larger numbers than hitherto'.<sup>815</sup> Although the Sultan regarded the British subsidy as important, he told Carden that the continued secondment of personnel was, in contrast, irreplaceable.<sup>816</sup> He remonstrated in February 1967 when Britain presented him with a new agreement that only provided for one more year of secondments to his forces. Carden tried to explain to the Sultan that Britain could not be expected to loan military personnel forever. The Sultan, however, replied that Carden had missed the crux of the matter: providing British personnel on loan to the SAF was a common interest. Carden had initially recommended to his superiors that seconding should be reviewed on a year-on-year basis in order to give Britain leverage over the Sultan, but he now wanted to abandon this approach. The reason for this was that Carden believed,

Britain must accept the fact that providing him these men is the heart of our relationship with him, and is firmly tied to our interest here, i.e. P.D.(O.) Ltd., the RAF air stations, the BBC relay station (Masirah), and the Sultanate's bearing on the position in the Gulf.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>813</sup> TNA FO 371/185379, D.C. Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Foreign Office, 18 June 1966.

<sup>814</sup> The first oil revenues not expected until December 1967. To make up the shortfall the Sultan sold some of his sterling securities despite the devaluation of the pound. TNA FO 371/185378, D.C Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), enclosing note on the military subsidy, 12 October 1966.

<sup>815</sup> TNA FO 371/185379, D.C. Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Foreign Office, 18 June 1966.

<sup>816</sup> [D.C.] Bill Carden, 'British Political and Military Relations, 1965-69,' in *Tempest* (2009), p. 180.

<sup>817</sup> TNA WO 32/212231, D.C. Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 2 February 1967.

Secondments to the SAF continued and remained at the centre of British involvement in Omani defence affairs for decades to come.<sup>818</sup>

## 5.6 The Scouts: *The Force for the Trucial States?*

It was not the presence of the Trucial Oman Scouts that deterred Saudi Arabia from pursuing its territorial claims in Eastern Arabia; it was Britain's special treaty obligations that conferred protective status on the Trucial States. The United States understood this. A State Department position paper from 1962, 'Oil and Interdependence in the Middle East', assessed that:

Should the British completely sever their special ties with these shaikhdoms, Saudi Arabia would probably not hesitate to occupy the Trucial Coast by force. It is unlikely that Iraqi or Iranian threats to intervene would deter the Saudis in this move, nor would the 1,000 British-officered Trucial Oman Levies pose much of an obstacle.<sup>819</sup>

But the TOS was part of how Britain would protect the area from attack, and the force was reconfigured into a war-fighting organisation for this purpose. By emphasising the TOS's military utility for Britain's presence in the Gulf, and by deploying squadrons into the Omani interior in the late 1950s, Britain had undermined its original policy of encouraging the Trucial States rulers to look upon the force as their own. The Political Agent in the Trucial States, Donald Hawley, was particularly alarmed at the move away from the TOS's original policing role. On 3 May 1961, Hawley met with the British commander of the Qatari armed police, Ronald Cochrane, to seek his counsel on how best to re-organise the TOS to fulfil its original internal security functions.<sup>820</sup> British officials appreciated that any use of the force outside the Trucial States increased the view amongst the rulers that the TOS was simply a British tool.<sup>821</sup> The expansion of the SAF since the Jebel Akhdar War of 1957-9 obviated the need for the TOS to operate in Oman in the future, so the Foreign Office initiated a

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<sup>818</sup> Peter Thwaites and Simon Sloan, *Muscat Command* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 1995), pp. 74-6.

<sup>819</sup> TNA FO 371/162783, 'BNSP Planning Task Number III-H: Oil and Interdependence in the Middle East', 4 December 1962,

<sup>820</sup> Hawley (2007), pp. 290-291 and 294.

<sup>821</sup> TNA FO 371/156692, Military Coordination Committee, Persian Gulf, 'Operational Use of the Trucial Oman Scouts,' 28 April 1961; and TNA FO 371/157038, William Luce (Political Resident) to A.R. Walmsey (Foreign Office), 12 December 1961.

re-examination of the TOS's organisation and role. It asked the Political Resident for his appraisal. In his final proposal, Sir William Luce made it clear that he did not want to make any changes which might 'cause the TOS to degenerate into some kind of "scallywag" gendarmerie', but he recommended that it should be reconfigured from two regiments (one of which was the new mobile, Desert Regiment) into five squadrons.<sup>822</sup> By doing so, Luce felt that this more adaptable configuration would allow the Scouts to perform both a military and police function. Reflecting this revised approach, the recently formed TOS Desert Regiment was disbanded and a greater focus on policing was prescribed.<sup>823</sup> The War Office, which paid 50 percent of the costs for the TOS, agreed on the new structure of the TOS.<sup>824</sup> During 1962 the TOS was used mostly for traditional rural policing duties. In 1963 three squadrons of Scouts were deployed to Abu Dhabi when the local police were unable to cope with rioting by oil workers (see above).<sup>825</sup>

The move away from using the Scouts in future scenarios in Oman was an attempt by the British to deflect the local rulers, especially Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi, away from setting up their own militaries and instead look to the TOS as the best means for securing their territories. But Shaikh Shakhbut was adamant that he required an armed force of his own, predicating this need on the threat from Saudi Arabia. Britain, however, believed that the defence of the western approaches to Abu Dhabi should remain the responsibility of the TOS and the British military. Under plans at the time, the TOS commander was directed to prepare his forces to forestall a Saudi advance into the western part of Abu Dhabi – with support from the RAF – for four days, allowing time for British troops to assemble and defeat the Saudi forces in a land battle.<sup>826</sup> Once British ground forces arrived, the TOS would carry out a scouting role, providing reconnaissance, flank protection and local knowledge to the regular British

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<sup>822</sup> TNA FO 371/157062 William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 5 August 1961.

<sup>823</sup> Mann (1994), pp. 131-32.

<sup>824</sup> TNA FO 371/163046, R.A.M. Hendrie (Bahrain Residency) to T.A.H. Tyler (Foreign Office), 14 November 1962.

<sup>825</sup> Mann (1994), p. 139.

<sup>826</sup> TNA FO 371/157038, William Luce (Political Resident) to A.R. Walmsley (Foreign Office), 12 December 1961.

forces.<sup>827</sup> The War Office wanted Shaikh Shakhbut to recognise this contribution to his defence and, now that he had significant wealth from oil production, to contribute towards the costs of running the TOS.<sup>828</sup> On 21 May 1963, the War Office explained its position to the Foreign Office:

It is, as you are doubtlessly aware, the normal practice to recover the cost of military assistance from foreign territories whenever possible, and it seems to us that we would now be fully justified in inviting the Ruler of Abu Dhabi to contribute to the cost of this force [the TOS].<sup>829</sup>

Britain's Gulf representatives quickly shot holes in this argument. Why, they pointed out, would Abu Dhabi ever want to contribute to the costs of a force over which it had very little direct control at a time when it planned to set up its own military? The Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, Hugh Boustead, informed the Political Resident, Sir William Luce, of the rumours circulating about Shakhbut's intentions of setting up his own army. By May 1963 these plans had become more definite. '[S]omething is certainly in the air,' Boustead observed, and the affair was being conducted 'in great secrecy and as usual when anything fishy is going on in Abu Dhabi, the Edge family is deeply involved.'<sup>830</sup> Boustead suspected that Bill Edge, the British Deputy Commander of the Abu Dhabi Police, was planning to command the new force and accused Edge's wife of obtaining quotes from British manufacturers for weapons and military equipment. As for Edge himself, Boustead, a veteran of both World Wars, wrote that he is 'not a suitable person to set up such a force since his military, as opposed to police, experience is limited to a period as a lance-corporal in the Lincolnshire Regiment before the [Second World War], and as far as I know there is no intention of employing any other British officers.' Boustead disapproved strongly of the proposal of an army for Abu Dhabi, especially as he was not consulted. 'The army is clearly intended for the Ruler's personal

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<sup>827</sup> TNA FO 371/ 163046, General Office Commanding, Middle East Land Forces to Undersecretary of State (War Office), 'Revised Establishment Proposal for the Trucial Oman Scouts,' 23 June 1962.

<sup>828</sup> War Office became the Ministry of Defence in 1964.

<sup>829</sup> TNA FO 371/168934, War Office to Foreign Office, 21 May 1963.

<sup>830</sup> TNA FO 371/168934, Hugh Boustead (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to William Luce (Political Resident), received 30 May 1963.



prestige,' Boustead wrote, 'and is probably designed eventually to supplant the TOS.'<sup>831</sup>

If Abu Dhabi did decide to go its own way and create an army, Luce thought it would be in Britain's interests to assist. He proposed offering to hand over perhaps two squadrons of the TOS, together with some administrative staff, to provide the nucleus of an Abu Dhabi force. In this way the Abu Dhabi army could take over some of the Scouts' responsibilities in the shaikhdom. By 1964, however, the Residency considered this policy unwise. What had changed? British officials now had less faith in Shakhbut's ability to develop the Abu Dhabi state and believed that he was creating a military force to defend himself against challengers to his rule. It is quite possible, Mr Brown at the Residency told the Foreign Office,

[. . .] that one of the main reasons for him thinking again of having an army is to protect his own personal position vis-à-vis other members of his family, for instance against Shaikh Zayed who already has between 100 and 150 armed retainers in his employment in Buraimi.'<sup>832</sup>

Hugh Boustead suspected that Shakhbut's pursuit of his own military force been encouraged after visiting King Faisal of Saudi Arabia had been told about the formation of a loyal Bedouin National Guard (or White Army as it was more commonly known) which had been formed to protect the Saudi throne from internal challengers.<sup>833</sup> Like the 'White Army', Shakhbut's proposed force was for regime survival.<sup>834</sup> Shakhbut was concerned about excessive numbers of Palestinians, Jordanians and Lebanese workers in Abu Dhabi who might stoke subversion and opposition to his rule.<sup>835</sup> The proposed military, Britain suspected, would be positioned to defend the palace and causeway only and not the western approaches to Abu Dhabi, thus there would be little advantage

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<sup>831</sup> Ibid.

<sup>832</sup> TNA FO 371/174719, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 29 July 1964.

<sup>833</sup> The National Guard as such was formed in 1953 by King Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud after he succeeded his father to the Saudi throne. On the history of the Saudi National Guard and Britain's involvement, refer to multiple files in: TNA FO 371/168892.

<sup>834</sup> TNA FO 371/179927, J.E.H. Boustead (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to William Luce (Political Resident), 27 March 1965.

<sup>835</sup> TNA FO 371/179941, A.T. Lamb (Abu Dhabi Agency) to Horace Phillips (Bahrain Residency), 11 October, 1965.

in encouraging the scheme. In this way, transferring two TOS squadrons over to an Abu Dhabi military would simply mean that Britain would have to raise two more squadrons for guarding against Saudi incursions.<sup>836</sup>

When formulating policy on this issue, the Foreign Office accepted that it could not do very much to stop the Ruler if he had set his mind on forming his own military.<sup>837</sup> For one thing, Britain no longer controlled the import of arms. The unrestricted influx of modern arms was already causing concern. Luce informed the Foreign Office in October 1964 that Shakhbut had armed his personal bodyguard with automatic weapons, that his tribesmen loyal to him had been seen leaving his palace with new rifles, and that were reportedly suspicious unopened crates stored in his palace.<sup>838</sup> Faced with the reality that the horse had already bolted, the Residency advised that Britain should,

[. . .] try to get in on the ground floor and give him all the help in recruiting British and Jordanian officers, in training and in selling weapons and equipment we can, in the hope that the force will be efficient and that we can guide it into undertaking sensible tasks and carrying them out properly.<sup>839</sup>

As the new British policy was to guide rather than oppose Shaikhbut's scheme for a military, the Ministry of Defence submitted a detailed plan for an Abu Dhabi Defence Force (ADDF). By the end of 1964, this force was established with about 250 men filling the ranks. Shakhbut gave his son, Shaikh Sultan, who had spent three years in the TOS, responsibility for overseeing the creation of the ADDF. In 1965, Britain tried to slow the rapid growth of the force by delaying arm exports to Abu Dhabi by throwing up bureaucratic obstacles. The Foreign Office asked the Ministry of Defence to process weapon orders slowly, though not too slow that Abu Dhabi looked elsewhere for arms supplies.<sup>840</sup> Shaikh Shakhbut continued to look to Britain for arms and officers to train and run the

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<sup>836</sup> TNA FO 371/174719, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 29 July 1964.

<sup>837</sup> TNA FO 371/174719, D.J. McCarthy (Foreign Office) to Col. J.S.L O'Neill (Ministry of Defence), 23 October 1964.

<sup>838</sup> TNA FO 371/174717, William Luce (Political Resident) to Foreign Office, 26 October 1964.

<sup>839</sup> TNA FO 371/174719, F.D.W. Brown (Bahrain Residency) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 29 July 1964.

<sup>840</sup> TNA FO 371/179927, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to F.J. Burlace (Ministry of Defence), 4 February 1965.

ADDF. In order to ensure Britain retained a level of direct influence in Abu Dhabi's military scene, Hugh Boustead thought it was critical that the two British officers Shakhbut asked for should be seconded and not contract officers.<sup>841</sup> This advice was heeded, and the TOS was asked to give up one of its most experienced officers, Major 'Tug' Wilson, to command the new force.<sup>842</sup> Wilson would remain a regular British officer on loan to Abu Dhabi. The willingness to provide Wilson to the ADDF represented one part of a more supportive approach towards the new force. Resident Luce sketched his thinking in April 1965 to the Foreign Office as to why Britain should abandon the policy of delaying weapons supplies to Abu Dhabi:

I think we must accept that the Ruler intends to have an army, and, this being so, I recommend that we should meet his requests as far as possible for our assistance in equipping and training it. It is in our interests that it should become a reasonably efficient force. The order of equipment should therefore be allowed without further delay on our part.<sup>843</sup>

The Foreign Office, following Luce's recommendation, dropped the plan to delay the delivery of equipment.<sup>844</sup> The change in British policy towards the ADDF was remarkable. Britain now hoped that the ADDF would be more than a prestige force, perhaps assuming some the TOS commitments in Abu Dhabi. It held the prospect,' the Foreign Office hoped, 'of an eventual saving by the reduction in the number of squadrons in the Scouts as soon as the Abu Dhabi army is sufficiently developed to take over from the Scouts in Buraimi or the oilfield, or both.'<sup>845</sup> T.F. Brenchley wrote to the Residency in August 1965 that 'we should be ready to go out of our way to promote a rapid development of the Abu Dhabi army, not only by seconding British officers to it and supplying arms, but also by helping it build up its strength in Arab personnel.'<sup>846</sup> The

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<sup>841</sup> Ibid, J.E.H. Boustead (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to William Luce (Political Resident), 27 March 1965.

<sup>842</sup> Freddie De Butts, *Now the Dust has Settled: Memories of War and Peace, 1939-1994* (Padstow, UK: Tabb House, 1995), p. 194.

<sup>843</sup> TNA FO 371/179927, William Luce (Political Resident) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 17 April 1965.

<sup>844</sup> TNA FO 371/179929, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to F.J. Burlace (Ministry of Defence), 3 May 1965.

<sup>845</sup> TNA FO 371/179929, T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office) to H. Phillips (Bahrain Residency), 10 August 1965.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid.

appointment by Shaikh Sultan of an anti-British Jordanian, Mufla bin Sulaiman, to a senior position in the ADDF threatened to scupper this policy.<sup>847</sup> According to a report from the Political Agency in Abu Dhabi, Mufla, who it later transpired was expelled from the Jordanian Arab Legion for pro-Nasser activities, was

[. . .] making no secret in the bazaar that he is working against British influence in Abu Dhabi, his major target at present being Colonel [Tug] Wilson. He is demanding that the Abu Dhabi Army should be composed only of Bedu and that the Imperialistic trick of putting British officers in command should be thwarted.<sup>848</sup>

Suspecting that Mufla had the ear of the Ruler and his inner circle, the Political Agent, Archie Lamb, argued that Britain could not 'tamely accept the presence of an anti-British agitator'.<sup>849</sup> Mufla bin Sulaiman was unable to cement his position before another British officer, Captain Wotner, joined as Tug Wilson's deputy.

Shaikh Shakhbut had originally stated that he wanted an army of 500 men with the ability to conduct camel patrols into the far reaches of his territory. Colonel Tug Wilson commanded a force in mid-1966 that was under a third of this size.<sup>850</sup> Despite his initial enthusiasm for an army, Shakhbut's parsimony towards the police was extended to the ADDF – he refused to pay for the most basic of essential stores and equipment. In light of this, the Political Agent recommended that Britain should scrap plans to withdraw the two TOS squadrons from Abu Dhabi; the ADDF could not fulfil the task of protecting the western approaches to the Trucial States.<sup>851</sup>

Spending money on a defence force whilst at the same time depriving the shaikhdom of any real investment in infrastructure or social services was

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<sup>847</sup> He was thought to be a formal corporal in the Arab Legion until 1955. Mufla came over to Sharjah in 1951 as part of the training team when the Trucial Oman Levies were established. It is believed that he re-enlisted in the Arab Legion in early 1960s

<sup>848</sup> TNA FO 371/179929, A.T. Lamb (Abu Dhabi Agency) to Horace Phillips (Bahrain Residency), 21 September 1965.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid, A.T. Lamb (Abu Dhabi Agency,) to Horace Phillips (Bahrain Residency), 11 October 1965

<sup>851</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to P. Gent (Foreign Office), 7 June 1966.

one of the reasons that his family decided to depose him in August 1966.<sup>852</sup> The TOS Commander at the time, Freddie De Butts, recalls in his memoirs: ‘In true Arab style, Shakhbut was prepared to spend his oil revenue not where it was needed but where it would give him heightened prestige amongst his peers – on a private army of his own.’<sup>853</sup> For a long time Britain had considered Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi as the most opposed to modernization among the rulers of the protected states. By the mid-1960s, he ruled over the largest and richest of the Trucial shaikhdoms.<sup>854</sup> The shaikh’s general resistance to change and his determination to maintain absolute control over the internal affairs of his shaikhdom thwarted British plans to harness the growing oil wealth for the aim of modernising Abu Dhabi.<sup>855</sup> At the same time, British officials were forming a very favourable opinion of his brother, Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. In Sir William Luce’s opinion, ‘The replacement of Shakhbut by Zayed offers the only real hope of peaceful evolution for Abu Dhabi in the difficult years which lie ahead; the continuation of Shakhbut’s rule spells revolution, sooner or later.’<sup>856</sup> Luce proposed withdrawing British recognition of Shakhbut’s rule and transferring it to Zayed. If necessary, British officials would assist Zayed in removing his brother from the shaikhdom by arranging for the Trucial Oman Scouts to escort him to Dubai or Sharjah.<sup>857</sup> Prime Minister Harold Wilson approved the Foreign Secretary’s plan for deposing Shakhbut in December 1964.<sup>858</sup> The planned coup did not take place for a further 20 months. On the 4 August 1966, senior members of the ruling family presented the acting Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, Mr Nuttall, with a signed letter informing the British Government that they had collectively decided to depose Shakhbut. To avoid a

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<sup>852</sup> Archie Lamb, ‘The Shakhbut-Zayed Changeover’, in Tempest (2009), p. 149; and Andrea B. Rugh, *The Political Culture of Leadership in the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 75-78.

<sup>853</sup> De Butts (1995), p. 194.

<sup>854</sup> The Abu Dhabi Marine Area Company (ADMA) had begun to export oil in 1962 and the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company (ADPC) had made even bigger findings of oil in the interior, with exports starting in 1963.

<sup>855</sup> See Uzi Rabi, ‘Oil Politics and Tribal Rulers in Eastern Arabia: The Reign of Shakhbut (1928-1966),’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (May 2006), pp. 37-50; and Christopher Davidson, *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 30-41.

<sup>856</sup> TNA FO 371/174701, William Luce (Political Resident) to Stewart Crawford (Foreign Office), 27 May 1964.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid*; Bismarck (2013), pp. 175-7.

<sup>858</sup> Bismarck (2013), p. 180.

disturbance to peace and order, they requested British assistance in permanently removing Shakhbut and his two sons, Said and Sultan, from the shaikhdom. As soon as Nuttall received the letter, Balfour-Paul travelled to Abu Dhabi to inform Shaikh Shakhbut that his family had decided to depose him. In the event that the Ruler would reject the wishes of the family, the Residency flew in two squadrons of the TOS to Abu Dhabi overnight under the pretence of training manoeuvres. As the then-Deputy Political Resident, Glen Balfour-Paul recalls in his memoirs that the TOS moved close to the palace in the event they needed to intervene.<sup>859</sup> These preparations proved necessary: Shakhbut refused to step down, calling out that he would stay in the palace and defend himself with his armed retainers. The TOS closed in around the building shouting at the guards to come out and lay down their arms. Shaikh Shakhbut then emerged and was escorted to the airport and departed on an RAF plane.<sup>860</sup>

With Shaikh Zayed now at the helm, the Foreign Office thought it was the opportune moment to integrate the ADDF into the TOS. The Foreign Office was working towards a position in 1966 where it could hand over formal control of the TOS to the rulers. This goal would be easier to achieve if there was one integrated force (i.e. if the ADDF was amalgamated into the TOS).<sup>861</sup> The Political Agent, Archie Lamb, thought this proposal was little more than ivory tower thinking:

My conversations [with Shaikh Zayed] have revealed that the Ruler has the ADDF close to his heart and is determined to build it up into a really effective force. He sees it as essential for the security of his state both because of its professional competence under the command of Wilson, for whom he has the highest regard, and because of the pathetic state of the police force, upon which he cannot presently rely.<sup>862</sup>

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<sup>859</sup> Glencairn Balfour-Paul, *Bagpipes in Babylon: A Lifetime in the Arab World and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 203.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

<sup>861</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, Foreign Office to Bahrain Residency, 17 August 1966. If that was not possible, The Foreign Office proposed merging the Abu Dhabi Police and ADDF to produce an effective police unit and then to ask Zayed to contribute £500,000 p.a. for the TOS.

<sup>862</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to Foreign Office, 'Abu Dhabi Defence Force,' 19 August 1966.

Moreover, in Lamb's opinion pushing integration would result in the Ruler losing confidence in Britain's willingness to support the ADDF. Zayed wanted to expand the force to 1,500 men and add a sea wing of fast patrol boats. The Political Agent advised that Britain should therefore drop the idea of amalgamation and concentrate on building up the ADDF to a standard where it is able to work with the TOS and perhaps relieve one squadron in Abu Dhabi territory.<sup>863</sup> But the Residency still wanted to pursue integration out of fear that the other Trucial States would set up their own militaries. Such a move by the other rulers would undermine the position of the TOS as the future force of a future federation. In August 1966, the Deputy Political Resident, Glen Balfour-Paul, explained the Residency's position:

If Zayed goes ahead with the expansion of his own Army, it seems to me inevitable that the fashion for private Armies will spread up the coast, beginning in Dubai. If this happens, we shall sooner or later find the TOS squeezed out of the most of the Trucial States – and this at a time when stability is increasingly threatened and the need for a centrally controlled security force covering the whole area and acceptable to the Rulers is greater than ever. By all means let the Rulers have their own Police Forces but we must surely prevent the situation arising in which the acceptability and impartiality of the TOS as the recognised common security force are undermined.<sup>864</sup>

Britain's use of the TOS to depose unfavourable rulers surely made its aim of promoting the force as belonging to the rulers of the Trucial States – including Shaikh Zayed – that much harder. In 1965 the TOS had been involved in deposing Shaikh Saqr of Sharjah. Along with the Deputy Resident, the TOS escorted Saqr to the airport and he was flown on an RAF plane to Bahrain. When the TOS received reports that the Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah was raising tribesmen to march on Sharjah and depose Shaikh Khalid, Britain deployed the Scouts in blocking positions on the roads leading to Sharjah.<sup>865</sup> Similarly, the TOS were, as shown, involved in Shaikh Shakhbut's deposition. Though Zayed benefitted from the TOS role in ousting his brother, it would not have escaped his attention that the Scouts were used to depose one of the serving rulers they were supposed to be protecting.

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<sup>863</sup> Ibid.

<sup>864</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, H.G. Balfour-Paul (Deputy Political Resident) to A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi), 22 August 1966.

<sup>865</sup> Mann (1994), pp. 152-3.

Realising that Zayed was inexorably opposed to integration, Britain pursued a middle option of placing the ADDF under the operational command of the TOS, synchronising training and compatible weapons and equipment. The British government tried to make this official in an 'Exchange of Letters'.<sup>866</sup> Shaikh Zayed gave his initial assent but then reversed course. He declared that there had been too much talk recently of Britain wanting to take over the ADDF. He was the *Rais* [ultimate commander], he told the Political Agent, and the ADDF Commander would be Wilson. Zayed was adamant that TOS Headquarters in Sharjah would have no control of his force. Though he was still a serving British officer on secondment, Colonel Wilson spoke of his resentment of military and political direction from the British government.<sup>867</sup> By the end of 1966, fractures between the TOS and ADDF widened. Wilson did not want to pass on his monthly intelligence and patrol reports to the TOS because he did not receive similar information from the TOS squadrons based in Abu Dhabi. Matters worsened when Wilson met the new TOS commander-designate. "So you are the officer who deserted the TOS," the soon-to-be Scouts commander remarked. Wilson was livid. It was unforgivable, he told the Political Agent, that a remark about desertion should have been made to a regular officer of the British Army.<sup>868</sup>

The formation of the ADDF not only scuppered British plans to have a single force for the Trucial States under a common command, but it also led to some of the other rulers embarking on building their own forces. The former TOS Commander, Freddie De Butts, recalls in his memoirs that although 'the ADDF was not an operational force of any consequence for several years, its formation started a chain reaction, inevitably undermining the role of the Scouts.'<sup>869</sup> The Political Resident had recently fought off an attempt to reduce the size of the Scouts. In August 1966, the Chief of Defence Staff (Britain's

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<sup>866</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to Bahrain Residency, 25 August 1966; and Ibid, Bahrain Residency to Foreign Office, 23 August 1966.

<sup>867</sup> TNA FO 371/185551, A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 29 November 1966.

<sup>868</sup> Ibid, Record of Conversation between A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) and Tug Wilson (CADDf), 28 November 1966. ADDF at this stage is 355 strong. Idea of an Air Wing dropped for the time being.

<sup>869</sup> De Butts (1995), p. 194.



most senior military officer) endorsed Resident Luce's appeal to keep all five squadrons.<sup>870</sup>

In 1967, the Ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Rashid, decided to establish a military. The idea of his own force had been brewing in the Ruler's mind for some years. In 1965, Rashid made enquiries about purchasing Ferret scout cars. The Political Agency at the time did not believe that they would be for the police but that the Ruler had a new quasi-military force in mind. British officials recognised back then that if Shaikh Rashid decided to buy some kind of armoured vehicle there will be very little Britain could do to stop him.<sup>871</sup> The events of 1966/67 pushed Shaikh Rashid towards a final decision. In September 1967, Balfour-Paul described the evolution of Shaikh Rashid's thinking:

Ever since Shakhbut insisted on forming a private army two years ago we have recognised the likelihood that other Rulers in the Trucial States – Rashid anyway – would want to follow suit. Certainly he began brooding actively on the idea when he saw his own expansionary ambitions thwarted last summer by the replacement of Shakhbut by Zayed (with TOS assistance). His discovery of oil in commercial quantities soon after no doubt pushed the process further. The disturbances last June disclosed to him the inadequacy of his civil police. His growing resentment at Zayed's unconcealed intention to dominate the Trucial States has been bringing him, I suspect, steadily nearer the point of decision. The collapse of shaikhly rule in South Arabia provided both justification and pretext for finally reaching it.<sup>872</sup>

Balfour-Paul tried to dissuade Shaikh Rashid, arguing that the proliferation of private armies was counter to the attempts to bring Trucial States together. He told Rashid of Britain's aim to associate the TOS with the Trucial States Council so that it would eventually become the defence force of the rulers. If that was the case, Rashid responded, why had Britain permitted Abu Dhabi to form its own military? The reality was, of course, that Britain could not stop Shakhbut. Accepting that his entreaties were not hitting their mark with Shaikh Rashid, Balfour-Paul changed tack, proposing that Britain nominate a TOS squadron placed at the Ruler's personal disposal. Rashid rejected this suggestion, for

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<sup>870</sup> TNA FO 1016/736, H.C.E. Harding (Head of C-in-C MEC's Secretariat) to Bahrain Residency, 31 August 1966.

<sup>871</sup> TNA FO 371/179927, H.G. Balfour-Paul (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.C.S. Weston (Foreign Office), 2 November 1965.

<sup>872</sup> TNA FCO 8/888, H.G. Balfour-Paul (Deputy Political Resident) to A.J.D. Stirling (Foreign Office), 14 September 1967.

calling in help from an outside force would damage his standing with his people – he must have his own force. Moreover, the danger that Britain might one day leave the Gulf made it imperative, he said, for the Al Maktoum to rely on their own resources. Balfour-Paul tried one last argument. He argued that a small defence force would be inefficient and expensive. Would it therefore not make more sense to simply add a riot squad to the police rather than set up a new organisation from scratch? But Rashid was determined to have something with a military flavour which would inspire respect of a different kind than the police did. Shaikh Rashid wanted his British police commandant, Jack Briggs, to command the defence force as well. In addition, he told Balfour-Paul that he wanted several other British officers of the same type found in the TOS to assist Briggs; he told Balfour-Paul that he did not want or trust Arab officers. Although Rashid had decided to press ahead in spite of British entreaties, Balfour-Paul thought there were some ‘crumbs of comfort’. He believed that British advice would continue through Briggs and that the Ruler might settle for a force no more distinct from the police than was the case with the Qatari ‘army’. In this way, Balfour-Paul mused, ‘Briggs would become the Cochrane of Dubai’.<sup>873</sup> Writing to the Political Resident, Sir Stewart Crawford, in late October 1967, the Foreign Office repeated its position that Britain

[. . .] ought not to encourage Rashid to go for his own Defence Force; it would not make any military sense; it is unlikely he could afford it; and it would in the present situation exacerbate his political relationships not only with [Shaikh] Zayed but also with his Northern neighbours.<sup>874</sup>

Whatever the future held for Britain’s longevity in the Gulf, Sir Stewart Crawford, like his predecessor, believed that it was in the interests of the Trucial States rulers to back the TOS:

[G]iven our long-term aim of ensuring stability, both while we are present in the Gulf and after we have gone, we must, I am quite sure, hold on tight in the Trucial States to preserving the Scouts as an effective and unified force for local security.<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>873</sup> Ibid.

<sup>874</sup> TNA FCO 8/888, Sir Stewart Crawford (Political Resident) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), ‘Dubai Defence Force and the Trucial Oman Scouts’, 20 October 1967.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

Rashid's enthusiasm for an army appeared to wane at the end of 1967. He instructed Briggs to expand the police from 350 to 600 and to add a mobile wing for internal security duties and anti-riot work. Crawford was confident that Britain 'can forget about the possibility of a Dubai Defence Force in the foreseeable future'.<sup>876</sup>

The forthcoming withdrawal from Aden and South Arabia, coupled with sharpened confrontation in the Arab World, exposed the British position in the Gulf and the shaikhly regimes alike. The impending build-up of the British garrison at Sharjah to 2,400 personnel worried local officials.<sup>877</sup> For one thing, the increased British Army and RAF presence in Sharjah made it increasingly difficult for the TOS to maintain a separate identity as a local Arab force intimately connected with the rulers and people of the Trucial Coast. Indeed, the TOS was already becoming known locally, the Political Resident reported, as just a part of the '*al-Jaysh al-Ingleezi*' (English Army).<sup>878</sup> As it was highly undesirable that British troops stationed in Sharjah should be involved in internal security matters, save in an extreme emergency, the Political Resident argued that any TOS reduction would weaken the British Government's ability to maintain law and order.<sup>879</sup>

## **5.7 British Decision to Withdraw (1967-8): Protégés to Guard Themselves?**

In January 1968, Britain announced that it would be withdrawing from the Gulf by the end of 1971.<sup>880</sup> Britain had assured the rulers throughout 1967 that it had no immediate plans to abandon its military presence in the Gulf. They were thus

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<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> TNA FO 1016/736, Brig. Michael W. Holme (CLFPG) to Maj. Gen. J.E.F. Willoughby (GOCMELF, Aden), February 1966.

<sup>878</sup> TNA FO 1016/736, Sir William Luce (Political Resident) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 28 February 1966.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid, Sir William Luce (Political Resident) to T.F. Brenchley (Foreign Office), 'Future Strength of the TOS,' [attached to letter], 16 July 1966.

<sup>880</sup> There is a substantial (and growing) literature that has sought to describe and explain the reasons for Britain's withdrawal from east of Suez. The most comprehensive account remains Dockrill (2002) and Smith (2004). On the narrower matter of the British pull-out from the Gulf refer to: Shohei Sato, 'Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964-68: A Pattern and a Puzzle,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 37, no. 1, (2009) pp. 99-117; and Wm Roger Louis, 'The British Withdrawal from the Gulf, 1967-1971,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2003), pp. 83-108.

understandably 'dumbfounded by the abrupt reversal'.<sup>881</sup> The Foreign Office Minister of State, Goronwy Roberts, had to return to the area in January 1968 to deliver Britain's volte-face personally to the local rulers.<sup>882</sup> Anthony Parsons, the Political Agent in Bahrain, recalls in his memoirs that, whilst in the car with Goronwy Roberts, en-route to see the Bahraini ruler, he 'made no bones about the fact' (to Roberts) that the news 'would come as a violent shock'.<sup>883</sup> Britain was giving the protected states less than four years to prepare to go it alone. Muscat and Oman, which had relied heavily on Britain's defence architecture in the area, would also be affected. Britain's impending exit meant that indigenous forces would have to take on even more of an important role. Philip Larkin, in his poem *Homage to a Government* (1969), one of the few cultural commentaries that marked the ending of the 'east of Suez' role, observed that self-reliance would be the new watchword for Britain's protégés:

*Next year we are to bring all the soldiers home  
For lack of money, and it is all right.  
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,  
Must guard themselves, and keep themselves orderly.  
We want the money for ourselves at home  
Instead of working. And this is alright.*<sup>884</sup>

Observers at the time were sceptical about the ability of the small Gulf monarchies to 'guard themselves, and keep themselves orderly,' predicting a bleak future for the area after Britain's coming exit. Analyses at the time pointed out that Gulf states would be left wide open to Soviet encroachment and Arab nationalist movements.<sup>885</sup> The rulers themselves neither sought Britain's

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<sup>881</sup> Glencairn Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 124.

<sup>882</sup> Patrick Wright, 'The Run up to Independence', in *Tempest* (2009), p. 117.

<sup>883</sup> Anthony Parsons, *They Say the Lion, Britain's Legacy to the Arabs: A Personal Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986), p. 133.

<sup>884</sup> Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 141. Published in the *Times* in 1969, this poem gets the timing of Britain's withdrawal wrong (i.e. 'Next year we are to bring all the troops home').

<sup>885</sup> On the attention due to Britain's withdrawal decision refer to: William D. Brewer, 'Yesterday and Tomorrow in the Persian Gulf', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 23, No.2 (Spring, 1969) pp. 149-158; David Holden, 'The Persian Gulf: After the British Raj', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July 1971) pp. 721-735; Fabian Research Bureau, 'Arabia: When Britain Goes', *Fabian Research Series No. 259* (London: Fabian Society, 1967); D.C. Watt, 'The Decision to Withdrawal from the Gulf', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, (July 1968); Phillip Darby, 'Beyond East of Suez,'

impending exit nor welcomed it.<sup>886</sup> Indeed, some of the rulers endeavoured to stave off the pull out by offering to compensate London financially to maintain a military presence. Abu Dhabi and Qatar offered to make direct payments to Britain and Bahrain proposed to waive the rent on its bases used by British forces.<sup>887</sup> Dubai later confirmed the offer (speaking with the authority of the other protected states) as a joint one, designed to enable British forces to stay beyond 1971 until 'satisfactory alternative arrangements could be made.'<sup>888</sup> For one thing, they wanted to buy more time to develop their own security capabilities.

The British Government rejected the offer to subsidise its presence, explaining that the cost of stationing troops in the Gulf was but one part of the overall financial burden associated with meeting its defence obligations.<sup>889</sup> British Defence Secretary Denis Healey explained to the House of Commons in February 1968 that, 'among the various elements of military capabilities which we need to keep so long as we are in the Gulf there is the cost of the carrier force whose total functional cost is about £140 million a year.'<sup>890</sup> Without the ability to bring to bear a large maritime force in an emergency, Britain would be left in a position of responsibility without the real means of control. Goronwy Roberts, returning from his humiliating trip to the Gulf, made a similar point in the House of Lords:

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*International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct. 1970); Sir William Luce, 'Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East and Persian Gulf', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Vol. 114, No.653 (March, 1969); and D. Greenwood, 'The Economics of 'the East of Suez Decision', *Aberdeen Studies in Defence Economics*, No. 2 (October, 1973).

<sup>886</sup> John Duke Anthony, *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington, D.C.; Middle East Institute, 1975) p. 5.

<sup>887</sup> TNA FCO 8/85, Internal Foreign Office correspondence, M.S. Weir to T.F. Brenchley and Mr Morland, 'Draft reply on the question of rejecting the offer', 30 January 1968. The Gulf Rulers did attach a caveat to these offers that is 'that if the offers are unacceptable their public position will have to be that no official offer was made, it seems preferable to refer to them as "suggestions".' *Ibid.* On this same point, see Sato (2009), p. 108.

<sup>888</sup> TNA FCO 8/85, Internal Foreign Office correspondence, M.S. Weir to T.F. Brenchley and Mr Morland, 'Draft reply on the question of rejecting the offer', 30 January 1968.

<sup>889</sup> The rulers were thus informed on 30 January 1968 that their offer had been kindly rejected. TNA FCO 8/85, Internal Foreign Office correspondence, M.S. Weir to T.F. Brenchley, 'Draft Reply', 20 February 1968. D. C. Watt, an influential political commentator at the time, certainly argued the point that in his opinion the decision was essentially taken 'for reasons that have nothing to do with the real gain or loss to Britain's financial position.' Watt (1968), p. 321.

<sup>890</sup> Hansard, House of Commons: Vol.758, Cols. 1346/7, 13 February 1968.

[O]nce our forces are redeployed in Europe [Roberts said] it would not be practicable after 1971 to give a continuing military presence in the Gulf the backing in men and material it would need, even with the financial contributions from the rulers.<sup>891</sup>

The tumultuous events of 1967 had already given the local rulers cause to worry about security arrangements in the region. Referring to 1967 as 'The Year of Ostrich' (in that Qatar had to take its head out the sand), the Political Agent, R.H.M. Boyle wrote to the Residency that:

[. . .] the Middle East [Six Day] war and its aftermath with its threat to oil production, the devaluation of £ sterling, and finally the debacle in South Arabia wrought the inevitable change, and showed the Qataris clearly enough that an era was over, and that they must think in terms of existence, if not on their own, at least with less reliance on a friendly, protecting power.<sup>892</sup>

With the offer rejected, the Gulf states were left in little doubt that they would have to prepare for Britain's exit. Britain would also be ending its loose defence commitment to Kuwait. Britain's other commitment in the Gulf was to Muscat and Oman, though this was not directly affected by the decision to withdrawal, the Sultan had long relied on the British military presence, especially RAF transport for airlifting his troops between north and south Oman.<sup>893</sup> According to Anthony Parsons, the Gulf rulers were anxious because,

Apart from Oman, there were no indigenous defence forces in the area, only the police and the Trucial Oman Scouts controlled by the Political Resident. Also the Gulf was rich prey for external predators. Iran claimed Bahrain and Saudi Arabia had claims against parts of Oman and Abu Dhabi.<sup>894</sup>

Britain's vast commercial interests in the region would not vanish after 1971. The British government had a great deal at stake in ensuring that it left behind a stable order after withdrawal. During 1968-71, the years leading up to British withdrawal, Britain's policy in the protected states (and to a lesser extent

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<sup>891</sup> Hansard, House of Lords: Vol. 288, Cols. 774/5, 31 January 1968.

<sup>892</sup> TNA FCO 8/740 R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to H.G. Balfour-Paul, (Deputy Political Resident), 'Qatar Security Forces', 25 January 1968.

<sup>893</sup> Refer to Rabi (2006) pp. 351-364

<sup>894</sup> Parsons (1986) p. 132

Muscat and Oman) was concentrated on preparing them to adjust to coming changes that the end of *Pax Britannica* in the Gulf would bring. British efforts would be centred on creating the right conditions in the area in order to minimise the dismantling of Britain's military architecture.

## CHAPTER SIX: PREPARING THE GULF FOR WITHDRAWAL: TOWARDS A RESIDUAL ROLE, 1968-71

### 6.1 Strength in Unity: Preparations for Security in the Trucial States, 1968-69

When the government of Harold Wilson finalised the decision that Britain would withdraw from the Gulf, all British officials with an interest in the area held the common view that the seven Trucial States were too small to survive on their own. From here on, Britain pushed for their political federation with Bahrain and Qatar.<sup>895</sup> The US State Department, taking a greater interest in the region after Britain's January 1968 announcement, agreed that:

In the longer run, stability will depend on whether more viable indigenous political and economic mechanisms can be created, and this will probably only be possible if a greater measure of regional cooperation can be established among the weaker Gulf states.<sup>896</sup>

Anthony Parsons was optimistic about the prospects for federation, contending that the British decision 'had in fact stimulated a desire towards unity which our previous efforts had failed to achieve.' '[T]he pressure of events', he believed, had 'created a new dynamic towards union in all the Gulf states'.<sup>897</sup> The ruler of Qatar instigated the first move – later called the Dubai Agreement – by obtaining in February 1968 an agreement in principal from the other rulers to form a union.<sup>898</sup> Myriad disputes and quarrels amongst the rulers and territorial claims from Iran and Saudi Arabia complicated efforts to bring the nine together. The American Central Intelligence Agency concluded in January 1969 that the nine protected states were 'unlikely to achieve any significant unity' and

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<sup>895</sup> Tore T. Petersen, *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East: A Willing Retreat* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2006) p. 127

<sup>896</sup> Background Paper on the Persian Gulf prepared in the State Department in advance of Prime Minister Wilson's visit. *Foreign Relations of United States* [Published by the State Department and hereafter abbreviated to FRUS] 1964-1968 XXI Near East Region.

<sup>897</sup> Parsons (1986) p. 135

<sup>898</sup> Louis (2003), p. 96; and Heard-Bey (1982), pp. 336-69.



that the scheme 'may even fall of its own weight before the British depart.'<sup>899</sup> Nevertheless, in the months immediately after the withdrawal announcement, Britain's efforts to prepare the protected states for the removal of British protection were based on a federation of nine.

The British Government's 1968 *Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy* stated that in the Gulf there should be 'a steady evolution in the local arrangements for defence and cooperation'.<sup>900</sup> For Britain this would be best achieved if the protected states moved towards unity in both political and security matters. In order to steer the protected states towards the model of a unified military, the British government appointed a joint defence adviser, Major-General Sir John Willoughby, to the protected states.<sup>901</sup> In 1969, Willoughby proposed to the rulers an integrated military built around an expanded TOS, with an air force of 18 Hunters and a naval component of 12 patrol boats added.<sup>902</sup> Willoughby also advocated that, as there was no Gulf Arab capable of serving as the commander of an integrated force, the federal military would need a British officer in the cockpit. Lord Chalfont, writing on behalf of Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, added in August 1969 that,

[. . .] the rulers would mistrust the choice of an Arab who was not from the Gulf. Indeed, except for the Ruler of Bahrain, they are opposed to the appointment of any Arab; and we know that they would welcome a British commander.<sup>903</sup>

The report was read with varying degrees of interest. Shaikh Zayed rejected Willoughby's plans because they were (a) not ambitious enough, and (b) placed too much emphasis on the TOS.<sup>904</sup>

Rather than lead the local rulers to think more seriously about integrating their security forces, the decision to withdrawal accelerated the move towards

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<sup>899</sup> National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 34-66), 'Iran', 10 January 1969, submitted by Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence. *FRUS*, Volume E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972.

<sup>900</sup> Lee (1980), p. 278.

<sup>901</sup> See footnote 77 in Balfour-Paul (1994), p. 225; and Mann (1994), p. 177.

<sup>902</sup> Darby (1970), p. 660. This plan was reported in the *Times* on 30 July 1969 and in the *Economist* on 6 June 1970.

<sup>903</sup> TNA PREM 13/3322 Minute by Lord Chalfont (in Foreign Secretary's absence), 'Persian Gulf: Future Support for Local Forces,' 29 August 1969.

<sup>904</sup> These views were alleged to have been made to Edward Heath on his pre-election visit to the area. TNA FO 1016/756, Bahrain Residency to Foreign Office, 'Visit of Mr Edward Heath,' 9 April 1969.

separate military arrangements for each state. In fact, this move towards individual militaries was codified at a meeting of the Supreme Council of the nine rulers meeting in Doha between 20 and 22 October 1968. It was decided that in any prospective union the individual states had the right to retain their own national guards.<sup>905</sup> Moreover, the uncertainty caused by the British withdrawal announcement served to re-ignite Shaikh Rashid's enthusiasm for what would become the Dubai Defence Force (DDF).

In the months before the Doha meeting, Shaikh Rashid asked Jack Briggs to make a plan for three rifle companies and a headquarters staff – all in all, a force of 500 men.<sup>906</sup> British officials once again tried to convince Shaikh Rashid to contribute financially to the TOS instead of starting his own military. The Political Resident, Sir Stewart Crawford, proposed stationing a TOS squadron in Dubai territory as well as giving the Ruler a private assurance of support against any overthrow attempt. The Foreign Office rejected this proposal outright. Giving an assurance to any ruler was inconsistent with Britain's policy of progressive disengagement. Moreover, the Foreign Office stated, a squadron of TOS was unlikely to meet Dubai's defence requirements. The Foreign Office set up a special working party to forestall Rashid from making a final decision on the DDF. British officials accepted that, so long as Rashid feared Shaikh Zayed dominating the future union, Shaikh Rashid could not be dissuaded from setting up his own force.<sup>907</sup> Britain decided, therefore, not to oppose Rashid on this matter. At any rate, continuing to do so would, the Foreign Office calculated, 'increase his [Shaikh Rashid] suspicion that we are backing Abu Dhabi, harden his resolve to go his own way and further reduce our chances of retaining any influence.'<sup>908</sup> Britain wished to remain involved in the Dubai defence scene. It was encouraged when Shaikh Rashid asked Britain to accept his third son, Muhammad bin Rashid, who was appointed Head of Police and Public Security, onto the British officer cadet course at Mons.<sup>909</sup> Getting young members of the ruling family on to military training courses in the

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<sup>905</sup> Heard-Bey (2007), p. 349.

<sup>906</sup> TNA FCO 8/888, Political Agency (Trucial States) to Foreign Office, 10 July 1968.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid, Foreign Office memorandum, 'Dubai Defence Force,' 19 July 1968.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid, Draft cipher telegram, Foreign Office to Bahrain Residency, 22 July 1968.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid, Political Agency (Trucial States) to Bahrain Residency, 'Dubai Police,' 7 March 1968; and Ibid, Political Agency (Trucial States) to Bahrain Residency 'Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid,' 23 March 1968.

home country had been a British policy for some time. At an interdepartmental meeting on defence exports in early 1965, for example, the Ministry of Defence noted that because young members of the ruling family would reach senior rank quickly in their own forces, it would be an advantage for British defence sales in the long run to engender in them a sense of preference in all things British. This, defence officials concluded, could be achieved by loading them on military and police training courses in Britain.<sup>910</sup>

Unlike Britain, Shaikh Zayed did not see a large independent ADDF as antithetical to the proposed federation. In a radio interview broadcast on the eve of a visit to Iran in early November 1968, Zayed claimed that his expansion plans for Abu Dhabi's military 'represents support for the Federation and strength for the Arabian Gulf Emirates.'<sup>911</sup> At any rate, there is no evidence that Shaikh Zayed ever seriously entertained the idea of merging his rapidly expanding defence force – by 1970 it was 3,500 strong – with a future federal military.<sup>912</sup> In Shaikh Zayed's opinion the ADDF was necessary because the TOS – still touted by Britain as the nucleus around which the federal military would grow – was only effective so long as it had the British military power to back it up. His position to think only in terms of the ADDF is illustrated by his arms purchasing policies at the time. When Britain proposed to Zayed that he purchase its combat aircraft (BAC.167s), as these would be compatible with other aircraft in a planned federal military, he declined on the grounds that planes were not prestigious enough. Shaikh Zayed wanted aircraft that would give him more influence vis-à-vis other Gulf rulers.<sup>913</sup> He requested British Hunter aircraft, but as these would not be ready for two to three years, Britain feared he might turn to France. In Britain's eyes, any prestige order of advanced aircraft by Abu Dhabi would reflect scepticism about the UAE and would in turn serve 'to deal a mortal blow to the Union force idea.' Moreover, as well as

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<sup>910</sup> TNA WO 32/21301, Minutes of Interdepartmental Meeting on Exports V (Defence), 30 January 1965. For further background on the importance of arms sales in British policy in the 1960s, see Phythian (2000), esp. pp. 62-74.

<sup>911</sup> Arab Report and Record, issue 21, 1-15 November 1968 cited in Heard-Bey (2007), p. 349.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid, p. 360.

<sup>913</sup> TNA FCO 8/1237, J. P Sheen (Ministry of Technology) to Defence Supply Department, Foreign Office, 'Purchase of BAC.167 aircraft by Abu Dhabi Defence Force,' 17 October 1968; and Ibid, Political Agency (Abu Dhabi) to Foreign Office, 28 November 1968.

alarming Dubai and Qatar, which, in the case of the latter, might feel obliged to emulate Shaikh Zayed, it was feared that such an order would have 'wider repercussions in Arabia and the Gulf.'<sup>914</sup> Abu Dhabi's growing dominance in the lower Gulf – Ajman, Umm al-Quwain and Fujairah were by the late 1960s financially dependent on Abu Dhabi – was partly the reason for the small shaikhdom of Ras al-Khaimah to set up its own force. One British official described Shaikh Saqr's (ruler of Ras al-Khaimah) 'fear and hatred of Shaikh Zayed', to be 'almost pathological' and 'not all of it is misconceived.'<sup>915</sup>

Shaikh Saqr told Britain's representatives that Ras al-Khaimah needed its own force to deal with the perennial problem of unruly tribes in the northern part of the shaikhdom, especially the Shihuh.<sup>916</sup> In 1968, for example, Shihuh tribesmen had fired at workers of a German company that the Ruler had contracted to quarry rock. They also shot at a Ras al-Khaimah Police detachment in April that same year.<sup>917</sup> Shaikh Khalid, the Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah's son and heir apparent, visited Riyadh on Christmas Day 1968, and asked King Faisal for financial support for his police and to help the shaikhdom set up a small defence force. He requested sufficient funds from the Saudi king to cover the cost of armoured cars, trucks, mortars, rocket launchers and the salaries of two British officers and 300 men (which included the existing police of 150 men) for a period of two years.<sup>918</sup> Unable to stop Ras al-Khaimah coming under Saudi influence, the Political Agent, Julian Bullard, encouraged Khalid to purchase arms of British manufacture so that when a union formed the Ras al-Khaimah military could merge with the other forces. Moreover, Bullard urged the Shaikh Khalid – and by extension his father Shaikh Saqr – to keep General Willoughby informed of their plans since the more numerous and larger the armies of the individual Trucial States, the more complicated would be his task in recommending how to weld them together. British officials hoped that Saqr would regard General Willoughby as the quarter from which he should draw all advice on the development of his security forces. The Military Coordination

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<sup>914</sup> TNA FCO 8/1237, Bahrain Residency to Foreign Office, 28 November 1968.

<sup>915</sup> TNA FCO 8/925, Political Agency (Abu Dhabi) to Bahrain Residency, 'Union of Arab Emirates' 2 November 1969.

<sup>916</sup> Heard-Bey (2007), p. 87.

<sup>917</sup> Mann (1994), p. 181.

<sup>918</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, J.L. Bullard (Political Agency, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Ras al-Khaimah Army,' 7 January 1969.

Committee, Persian Gulf decided that, when it came to reacting to requests for military equipment from Ras al-Khaimah, British policy should follow the principle of '*festina lente*'.<sup>919</sup> If British officials could not stop Ras al-Khaimah from establishing a force they wanted to minimise its impact by slowing down the import of modern weapons. As with the ADDF and the DDF, the Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah recruited a TOS officer to run his new force – Major David Neild. And so it was that in March 1969, the Ruler formerly invited Neild to raise and command a force of 150 men.<sup>920</sup> As for the matter of Saqr's selection for a British commander, Julian Bullard thought that Major Neild had the qualities to do the job excellently. Also important in Bullard's calculation was that Neild was a man who could serve Shaikh Saqr 'without losing sight of HMG's interests.'<sup>921</sup>

Even at this stage, the Political Resident had not abandoned hope that Bullard might be able to steer him away from an army concept and instead expand the police.<sup>922</sup> For one thing, a new force would undermine the position of the TOS. The Political Resident explained to Bullard:

In present welter of uncertainty about TOS, it seems clear at least that they should continue to be responsible for security in Northern Trucial States in period ahead. Saqr can have no possible complaint about their performance in this role or about the support they give to rulers. Creation of Ras al-Khaimah [military] would be bound to be seen as a challenge to them and might well lead other rulers to seek to follow. Also this is very bad moment for one ruler to go ahead independently with creation of Union force under consideration. Willoughby in a letter to me advises strongly against.<sup>923</sup>

Because the putative force would liaise closely with the TOS, and because Britain would not need to contribute financially towards the force – Saudi Arabia

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<sup>919</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, M. S. Weir (Bahrain Residency) to J. L. Bullard (Political Agency Trucial States), 'Ras al Khaimah Security Force,' 13 January 1969.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent Trucial States) to Foreign Office and Bahrain Residency, 'Ras al Khaimah Army,' 22 March. The contract offered was for three years at £5,000 p.a. with fringe benefits and allowances. Neild told the Ruler that he would do nothing without HMG's concurrence and that he would not be free until September when his contract with TOS expired.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agency, Trucial States) to Foreign Office and Bahrain Residency, 'Commander for Ras al-Khaimah Army,' 26 March 1969.

<sup>922</sup> Ibid, Stewart Crawford (Political Resident) to J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States), on RAK potential army, 26 March 1969.

<sup>923</sup> Ibid.

agreed to Shaikh Khalid's request – British officials were not entirely against its formation. Bullard wrote on 26 March 1969 that:

I understand that General Willoughby has accepted the case for a small local defence force in Ras al-Khaimah, chiefly as an insurance against recurrence of trouble with Shihuh tribesmen. This being so, and since there is no question of our being asked for financial assistance, I suggest that we should not oppose the project as such, even though it will obviously consume resources which could otherwise be spent on economic development.<sup>924</sup>

London balked at this line of reasoning: the Foreign Office could countenance the creation within the police of a strike wing armed with some mortars, but they were set against Ras al-Khaimah forming its own military apparatus at a time when General Willoughby was making proposals for a federal military based on the TOS.<sup>925</sup> But Bullard did not think Britain could dissuade Saqr. He relayed his conversation with the Ruler on the subject back to the Residency:

[Saqr] said he wanted to show his tribes who was master in the State, and to make it impossible for almost anyone to wander in from outside to stir up trouble or even attack him. When I suggested that he need have no fear so long as a TOS squadron was encamped at Hamham [a TOS camp inland from Ras al-Kahimah Town] he agreed at once, but said he felt obliged to make dispositions for the future. If the UAE succeeded in setting up effective forces (of which Saqr seemed sceptical) he would be glad to convert his little army into policemen. I then suggested that a Police Mobile Force on the Dubai model would be enough. Saqr said he did not think so; every man had his trade, and policemen and soldiers were two different things.<sup>926</sup>

Moreover, Shaikh Saqr would not wait for all the rulers to agree on a federated military and wanted to 'snap up the Saudi offer while it is still on the table,' according to Bullard.<sup>927</sup> Bullard proposed that Saqr should not call the new force an army but a mobile force, and should make it cooperate and not compete with

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<sup>924</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agency, Trucial States) to Foreign Office and Bahrain Residency, 26 March 1969.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid, Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary) to Bahrain Residency repeated for Dubai (i.e. Political Agency, Trucial States), 'Ras al-Khaimah Army,' 27 March 1969.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Ras al-Khaimah Army,' 15 April 1969.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to Foreign Office and Bahrain Residency, 19 May 1969.

the police.<sup>928</sup> Soon after, Major Neild – who was still serving with the TOS – travelled to London with the ruler’s son, Khalid, to place orders for British weapons and vehicles.<sup>929</sup> Ras al-Khaimah also asked if regular British troops stationed at Sharjah could help train Mobile Force soldiers in the use of armoured cars. This could be problematic, as A.J. Coles at the Trucial States Political Agency explained:

I do not think the [British Troops in Sharjah] have ever provided training facilities for local defence forces and I do not think they should start now (they have of course done a certain amount of liaison e.g. the ADDF and run one or two small-scale exercises.) The Iranians might I suppose take exception to the British army training the Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force [Iran claimed the Two Tunbs islands that belonged at the time to Ras al-Khaimah].<sup>930</sup>

Although an operational directive for land forces in the Gulf stated that a secondary role of British troops was to ‘assist in the development of local forces,’ British officials thought it was far more sensible to let the TOS fulfil this role.<sup>931</sup> A.J. Coles again:

The TOS have of course provided quite extensive training facilities for local defence and police forces, particularly the ADDF. As regards the Ras al-Khaimah force, a third batch of recruits is under training with the TOS who are also instructing a detachment of machine gunners and expect to begin in October the training of a mortar detachment.<sup>932</sup>

In the summer of 1969 Major Neild requested that a British military instructor be loaned to the Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force (RAKMF) for a fortnight to conduct armoured car training. Coles thought this could be done, but he did have his reservations.

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<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to T.J. Everard (Bahrain Residency), ‘Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force,’ 29 July 1969. See: ‘300-man army for Shaikh’, *The Times*, 15 July 1969; and ‘Shaikh Plans ‘Army’,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1969.

<sup>930</sup> Ibid, A.J. Coles (Political Agency Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), ‘Assistance to Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Police Force,’ 9 September 1969.

<sup>931</sup> Operational Instruction No. 1 of 1967 issued by Headquarters Land Forces Gulf on 21 September 1967.

<sup>932</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), ‘Assistance to Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Police Force,’ 9 September 1969.

This [the loan of an armoured car instructor for British troops in Sharjah] would hardly be likely to come to the notice of potential critics e.g. the Iranians. But in making any offer I think we should make it abundantly clear that it is unlikely that we shall be able to provide further assistance in the future. I have in mind particularly possible reactions from neighbouring states, e.g. Fujairah, if British troops, whom they regard as impartial, get too deeply involved in training the Ras al-Khaimah Force.<sup>933</sup>

Fujairah did in fact remonstrate against British assistance to Ras al-Khaimah in setting up the mobile force.<sup>934</sup> In October 1969, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the Shadow Foreign Secretary and the former Prime Minister, told the government that he was 'rather disturbed by some knowledge which has come my way about Saudi Arabia being encouraged to pay for a strike force for Ras al-Khaimah.' Douglas-Home, who would be Foreign Secretary the following year, argued that the danger in the Gulf was the proliferation of private armies, which was already in evidence in Abu Dhabi while Dubai and others were seeking arms. 'Is not all this exceedingly dangerous and does not allowing Saudi Arabia in on the act queer our pitch with Iran?' Douglas-Home asked.<sup>935</sup> The Foreign Office's response to Douglas-Home on 3 November 1969 is worth quoting in full:

As you know, the task of maintaining internal security in the Northern Trucial States is at present performed by the Trucial Oman Scouts. We hope that the TOS will eventually be incorporated into the Union Defence Force, as the Union Defence Adviser, General Willoughby, has recommended. But this recommendation has not yet been accepted by the Rulers. We believe it was generally endorsed at their recent meeting but until they go firm on acceptance we cannot count on this. Furthermore, as you probably know, Ras al-Khaimah suffers from a good deal of tribal unrest and we were advised by the British military authorities in the Gulf that a force of the type and size

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<sup>933</sup> Ibid, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to M. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Assistance to Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force,' 16 September 1969.

<sup>934</sup> Ibid, C.C.R. Battscombe (Foreign) to J.L. Bullard (Political Agency, Trucial States), 'Ruler of Fujairah's concern about Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah's Army Purchases,' 9 October 1969. David Llewellyn, who considered himself the Ruler of Fujairah's adviser in London, told the FCO that he had been instructed by the Ruler to lodge Fujairah's serious concern at the extent of the arms purchases Ras al-Khaimah was embarking and that it was a disastrous decision by the British government to allow the Ruler of Ras al-Khaimah to go ahead with these purchases

<sup>935</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Shadow Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister) to Goronwy Roberts (Foreign Office Minister of State), 16 October 1969.



envisaged by Shaikh Saqr would not be unreasonably large to maintain internal security in the State. In view of this we raised no objection to the idea in principle, even though we knew that it might not be very welcome to the Ruler of Fujairah or, perhaps, to Shaikh Zaid of Abu Dhabi.<sup>936</sup>

In mid-November, Julian Bullard tried one more time to convince the Ruler that the RAKMF was an unnecessary cost, especially as the TOS were already providing adequate security cover.<sup>937</sup> Shaikh Saqr replied that not one of his 21 years as ruler had been free from some kind of trouble with the tribes in the north. He wanted to rid himself of this problem. More than this, Britain's announcement to withdraw meant he had to guard against external threats. In an ideal world, Shaikh Saqr told Bullard, he would prefer the TOS to continue in its role beyond 1971, but he was certain that this would not happen, leaving his state exposed. When Saqr decided to continue with his mobile force, Bullard felt that Britain should desist with opposition. If there was any more criticism on this issue on the lines of Sir A. Douglas-Home, Bullard proposed making use of the Foreign Office's argument that Britain 'cannot very well stand in the way of such measures as the rulers think it necessary to take to guarantee their own security after we are no longer prepared to guarantee it ourselves.'<sup>938</sup>

The case of the Trucial States illustrated the point that the British government aspired for the protected states to form one political entity upon Britain's exit with a single military; a force built around the TOS but expanded along the lines of Willoughby's recommendations. At the same time, Britain reconciled itself to the fact that if the individual shaikhdoms wanted to take steps for the maintenance of their own security arrangements in preparation of Britain's exit than this was their prerogative. At any rate, as the Foreign Office conceded in November 1969 that 'if the rulers are determined to purchase arms and have or can get the money, we cannot stop them doing so.' All Britain felt it could do was to try and advise against setting up forces in excess of their

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<sup>936</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, Evan Luard (Foreign Office Permanent Undersecretary [PUS] who had taken over Goronwy Roberts' special responsibility for the Gulf area) to Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Shadow Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister), 3 November 1969.

<sup>937</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, J.L. Bullard (Political Agency, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force,' 18 November 1969.

<sup>938</sup> Ibid.

internal security requirements.<sup>939</sup> Both Bahrain and Qatar would later elect to become independent states, leaving Britain to concentrate on a union between the smaller seven Trucial states of the lower Gulf.

## **6.2 Keeping a Grip on the Steering Wheel: Britain's Policy towards Militaries in Qatar and Bahrain, 1968-70**

Both Qatar and Bahrain attended discussions on forming a federation of all nine of the protected states throughout 1968-70. Nonetheless, soon after Britain's announcement of withdrawal, they began organising their security forces as though they were preparing for independence. British policy in both of cases to steer the Al Thani and Al Khalifah rulers away from establishing expensive militaries and towards building up their capacity for internal control through their police forces and special branches. Since about the 1960s, Britain had realised that its ability to control the local security scene had waned. In particular, Britain found it increasingly difficult to control arm imports to the protected states in the final years before withdrawal. Accepting this reality, in April 1965 the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, wanted the British right to control the importation of arms transferred to the rulers as part of modernizing Britain's relationship with Bahrain and Qatar (the Trucial States were not considered ready). As he explained in a communiqué to the Political Resident, Sir William Luce, he did not want the monitoring of arms to stop.

I nevertheless hope that the Political Agents, by virtue of the good relations which they and their staff have built up with the local security authorities in Bahrain and Qatar, will be kept aware of any proposal to import arms which might have a bearing on internal security or on arms smuggling into the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.<sup>940</sup>

When in 1968 Qatar laid out its plans to expand its military, the Political Agent, Boyle, thought this was a mistake. He felt that Qatar's resources would be better expended by concentrating on the police, especially by developing an

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<sup>939</sup> TNA FCO 8/1245, Evan Luard (Foreign Office Permanent Undersecretary [PUS] who had taken over Goronwy Roberts' special responsibility for the Gulf area) to Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Shadow Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister), 3 November 1969.

<sup>940</sup> TNA FO 371/179749, Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary) to William Luce (Political Resident), 'Modernization in the Persian Gulf,' 1 April 1965.

investigatory section. After the disturbances of 1967 in Qatar, the Political Agent, Boyle, argued that a Special Branch system in Qatar remained an 'urgent' and 'unfulfilled necessity.'<sup>941</sup> He told the Political Resident, Sir Stewart Crawford, in January 1968 that he would be pushing Mohammad Mahdi (the name Ronald Cochrane took after converted to Islam in 1964), the Ruler (Shaikh Ahmad) and the Crown Prince (Shaikh Khalifah), to come round to this view. 'Cochrane, the Moslem convert,' Boyle told Crawford later in the month, 'has at last been converted to this [the proposal for a Special Branch], and for the first time has been impressing on me the necessity for having a[n] [lan] 'Henderson' [Head of Bahrain's Special Branch] in Qatar, as you have in Bahrain. He is now determined to convert Ahmad and Khalifah.'<sup>942</sup>

The Qatari leadership was more interested in building up military forces than discussing police matters. Indeed, the British decision to withdraw stimulated 'much talk of security, defence, arms and armies' in Qatar. Although such talk was, according to the Political Agent, 'high-flown and nebulous,' it became more grounded in the years that followed.<sup>943</sup> In January 1968, the crown prince, Shaikh Khalifah, instructed Mohammad Mahdi, Mr Lock (British head of Qatar Police), and Muhammad al-Attiyah (commanding the mobile military wing of the armed police) to together recommend the future shape of the security forces. Alarmed that the Al Thani would follow Abu Dhabi into what it described as 'the realms of military fantasy,' Britain took the initiative of sending the Deputy Commander British Land Forces Gulf, Colonel Fletcher, to guide the Qatar leadership on how it should expand the fledgling military. Fletcher outlined a plan for a headquarters, one guard and three infantry regiments, an artillery battery, a training depot, a logistic group, and an air wing – 1,850 men in total.<sup>944</sup> Any British support to reform or expand the military had to take into consideration the internal politics of the Al Thani ruling family. Boyle explained the dynamics at play:

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<sup>941</sup> TNA FCO 8/721 R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 'Review of Events in Qatar, 1967,' 3 January 1968.

<sup>942</sup> TNA FCO 8/740 R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to H.G. Balfour-Paul, (Bahrain Residency), 'Qatar Security Forces,' 25 January 1968.

<sup>943</sup> Ibid.

<sup>944</sup> TNA FCO 8/740 R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to H. G. Balfour Paul (Bahrain Residency), 'Qatar Security Forces: My Letter 10/5 of 25 May,' 29 June 1968; and TNA FCO 8/725, Extract from Record of the Gulf Counter Subversion Group, 7<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 20 June 1968 in Political Agency, Bahrain.

Sheikh Khalifah who is *de facto* ruler here in all aspects of life with the exception of control of the security forces, fully realises that he can never be *de jure* ruler (or oust Sheikh Ahmed) without this control. Any re-organisation of the security forces, therefore, depends on agreement between Sheikh Ahmed and Shaikh Khalifah.<sup>945</sup>

While Britain would have preferred that Qatar focus on developing its police force, it did not deny the protected state help when it was asked for, especially if this assistance did not cost Britain – and better still if Britain could make a profit. After a British Special Forces colonel from the Special Air Service (SAS) visited Qatar in March 1968, Britain received a request for a small SAS team to help train the Qatar armed forces. The request had the support of the Political Resident who thought it would foster goodwill between the British and Qatar governments; that it would increase British knowledge about Qatari forces, which was sketchy; and that it would provide the SAS with an opportunity to gain experience of working with Arab forces.<sup>946</sup> There was, however, a complication: the visiting SAS colonel had left Qatar's British Head of Public Security, Mohammad Mahdi, with the impression that Qatar would only have to pay the local expenses for the training team. The Ministry of Defence back in London was adamant that Qatar should foot the whole bill – a condition that Qatari Government would likely reject. The Political Resident put forward a strong case to the Foreign Office as to why Britain should find the money for sending over an SAS training team. His argument is illustrative of how British representatives saw the broader part Britain could play in defence and security matters leading up to withdrawal in 1971.

If (as seems likely) Qataris now reject the whole proposal, we shall have lost valuable opportunity to effect improvement in their Security Forces which is desirable in the interests of stability in the area, no less in Qatar than elsewhere. Secondly, our relations with Qatar Government will suffer; not only politically but possibly also in sales of military equipment. This deterioration would be particularly unfortunate in the period ahead when Qatar can be expected to continue playing an important role in the Southern Gulf in the

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<sup>945</sup> TNA FCO 8/740, R.H.M. Boyle (Political Agent, Qatar) to H. G. Balfour Paul (Bahrain Residency), 'Qatar Security Forces', 25 May 1968.

<sup>946</sup> TNA FCO 8/740, P.J.F. Mansley (Bahrain Residency) to M. S. Weir (Foreign Office), 'SAS Training for Qatar Security Services', 9 March 1968; and TNA FCO 8/740 HQLFPG to Ministry of Defence, 'SAS Trg Exercise in Qatar,' 9 March 1968.

aftermath of our January [1968] announcement [about the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf].<sup>947</sup>

After considerable wrangling, Britain reallocated money from other budgets to pay for the SAS training team.<sup>948</sup> This action shows that Britain was already thinking about (a) how it could best equip the protected states to cope after withdrawal, and (b) how it could retain involvement in these states beyond 1971, especially in the defence sales market.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, British security policy in Bahrain had centred on encouraging and cajoling the Al Khalifah rulers to invest in the State Police and its Special Branch. Even before Britain announced its intention to withdraw from the Gulf, Shaikh Isa began to form his own plans to establish a Bedouin praetorian guard in the style of Saudi Arabia's "White Army". In a candid discussion in January 1967 with the Political Agent, Anthony Parsons, Shaikh Isa declared he wanted Saladin armoured vehicles, machine guns and rocket launchers for this private force. Parsons warned the Ruler that this would land him with complicated equipment he would not be unable to maintain and that rockets that are not stored properly become volatile. 'Since he kept his armoury in his house,' Parsons wrote to the Political Resident on 8 January 1967, Sir Stewart Crawford, 'he might find it a little difficult to get to sleep at night with a mass of deteriorating rockets in the next room.'<sup>949</sup> Parsons simply could not imagine against what enemy the Ruler expected to use the rocket launchers. Shaikh Isa said he wanted a private armoury as an insurance policy against all eventualities and had already ordered Bazookas and other weapons from Czechoslovakia. As it was extremely undesirable to use British troops to maintain order, he reasoned to Parsons that the private armoury could be distributed to his retainers in Rifaa and to several hundred of his most loyal tribesmen who received a stipend. This force might make all the difference between Bahrain authorities holding the line without recourse to bring in British troops. He was not seeking to create another army; these Bedouin would not be in uniform, nor would they be organised in any formal structure. In an effort to

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<sup>947</sup> TNA FCO 8/740, Bahrain Residency to Foreign office, 6 April 1968.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid, A.J. Ward, Political Agency (Qatar) to A.J. D. Stirling (Foreign Office), 'SAS Assistance to Qatar Security Forces,' 1 August 1968.

<sup>949</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 8 January 1967.

explain to Parsons his thinking, Shaikh Isa recounted events from 1956 when there were disturbances beyond the powers of the police. His father had 'stationed bedu – black tents and all – in the eight worst villages: peace and quiet immediately reigned. "If the road had been lined by bedu, not police, [Isa told Parsons] no one would have dared throw a stone at Selwyn Lloyd in 1956!"' In the same letter to the Crawford describing his discussions with the Ruler, Parsons surmised that Britain should not oppose Shaikh Isa's plans. In fact, Parsons wrote,

[. . .] it should also give the urban and village agitators something to think about – they probably have a much healthier respect for bedu than for the Bahrain State Police. Apart from the deterrent value it is not inconceivable that they could play a useful part in supporting the police in an emergency e.g. by taking over certain rural areas, or taking on the whole of Rifaa and points south thus releasing the Rifaa and Rural Areas police for service elsewhere. I do not for a moment underestimate the military dangers inherent but, in the bizarre circumstances of Bahrain, I believe that bedu have proved useful in the not-too-distant past. I therefore believe that, rather than risk forfeiting Isa's confidence and exciting his suspicion by openly opposing his ideas, we should continue to express sympathy with his desire to strengthen his protective shield and to counsel moderation. If we can maintain his confidence – it is encouraging that he has consulted us in the first place – we should be able to keep some kind of grip on the steering wheel.<sup>950</sup>

Crawford agreed that, as Britain was not in a position to oppose Shaikh Isa, it should try to remain in a position of influence. The Political Resident understood that the British decision to pull out of Aden had created a great deal of uncertainty: 'Although he holds tightly to us,' Crawford summarised, 'he is preoccupied with the long-term future.' Crawford recommended that Britain should 'go along with the Ruler but try to keep his plans as sensible as possible and within a moderate scale.' One aspect of the ruler's plan that did cause British officials concern was the possible employment of British contract officers to train the retainers. Any impression that the Ruler was creating a rival to the State Police Force might cause the British police officers to throw in their hands, Crawford fretted.<sup>951</sup> For almost a year, the Ruler did not raise the matter of the

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<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

<sup>951</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, Stewart Crawford (Political Resident) to M.S. Weir (FO), 16 January 1967.

Bedouin force.<sup>952</sup> But in December 1967, after Britain privately told the rulers of their plans to leave the Gulf by 1971, Shaikh Isa told British officials he was determined to have his private guard and would have his son Shaikh Hamad, who was expected to pass out from the British officer cadet school (Mons), run it. The ruler said he was still thinking of a 'general insurance policy against any danger which might confront him following a British withdrawal from Bahrain.'<sup>953</sup> Contrary to British apprehensions, the Ruler claimed he carried the support of the senior British officers in State Police in his scheme. Parsons told Isa he had to carry his brother, Shaikh Mohammad, as well. In order to discuss the issue out in the open, the Ruler held a meeting on 13 December with Shaikh Khalifah, Shaikh Mohammad, Commandant Bell, Ian Henderson and Parsons (the Political Agent, an excellent Arabist, was translating to ensure there were no misunderstandings). Shaikh Isa assured Bell and Henderson that he considered them his most loyal and valuable servants and that he had complete confidence in the State Police. When it came to forming a Bedouin military force, Bell expressed his anxiety that its operational command was uncertain. The Ruler interrupted him: 'Mr Bell, the guard will not move except under your command'. No one at the meeting actively opposed the Ruler's plan to set up a guard. Summing up Britain's limited options, Parsons wrote to the Political Resident on 14 December: 'We cannot prevent Shaikh Isa from raising a private army: his motives are understandable. His attitude of mind has been conditioned by the events of the past two years in South Arabia.'<sup>954</sup> On the plus side, Parsons believed Shaikh Isa had abandoned his wilder ideas and was now looking at a more realistic force.

After Britain's public announcement in January 1968 that it was withdrawing from the Gulf by the end of 1971, Shaikh Isa's proposal to set up an armed force for Bahrain's national defence gathered impetus. Isa first considered bringing Jordanian or Saudi tribal Bedouin to fill the ranks of the new force. He then toyed with the idea of importing 2,000 Ghurkhas to form a loyal praetorian guard, similar to the Sultan of Brunei. Parsons, claimed that he had dissuaded – perhaps mistakenly, he later admitted – from implementing either

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<sup>952</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 18 November 1967.

<sup>953</sup> Ibid.

<sup>954</sup> Ibid, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 14 December 1967.

idea on the grounds that the presence of foreigners, especially the Ghurkhas, 'would be highly inflammatory on the local population and produce a greater risk even than having a force of Bahrainis.'<sup>955</sup>

Whomever the Bahraini Government recruited into ranks of a new military, British officials still assumed that a British officer would be sought to command the force and that at least half a dozen other British nationals would take the key posts.<sup>956</sup> For the top job, British officials searched for a British contract officer rather than a seconded officer because, it was thought, the Ruler would regard the latter as being 'the man of the British.'<sup>957</sup> Parsons makes the further claim that he moved the Ruler's thinking away from employing British officers altogether.

When he [Shaikh Isa] eventually settled on a Bahrain Defence Force [it was initially called the National Guard], I talked him out of employing contract British officers (he would not look at the idea of seconded British officers) on the ground that their presence would also be inflammatory; that he would not get a good type of officer; and that, from my own experience, such British officers would be extremely unlikely to know if the Bahraini elements of the force were planning a coup d'état. Eventually I persuaded him, if he felt that he had to establish a force, to go for Jordanian officers personally selected by King Hussein as being the safest bet. I still think that this was the least of all the possible evils.<sup>958</sup>

The Crown Prince, Shaikh Hamad, although only 19 and with a little military experience behind him, took charge of overseeing the establishment of the National Guard. He travelled to Jordan in March 1968 to ask King Hussein for a Jordanian training team for the fledgling National Guard. The King responded favourably, claiming that he would furnish Bahrain with the best officer he could find.<sup>959</sup> Despite being British-trained, Shaikh Hamad supported using Jordanian

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<sup>955</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, A.D. Parsons (Foreign Office) to Mr Allen (Foreign Office) regarding BDF, 14 April 1971. This memorandum was attached to: FCO 8/1639, Note by D.G. Allen, Arabian Department to Mr Parsons and Mr Allen, 'Bahrain: Internal Security,' 14 April 1971.

<sup>956</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir, (Foreign Office) regarding talks with the Ruler on plans for a defence force, 8 March 1968.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid.

<sup>958</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, A.D. Parsons (Foreign Office) to Mr Allen (Foreign Office) regarding BDF, 14 April 1971.

<sup>959</sup> TNA FCO 8/523, Despatch from John Peter Tripp, British Embassy, Amman to A.D. Parsons (Political Agency, Bahrain) regarding the visit of Shaikh Hamad to Jordan, 26 March 1968.



officers over British. In Jordan, Shaikh Hamad also met with the former Political Agent to Bahrain, Peter Tripp, who was now the British Ambassador in Amman. Making unfavourable references to General Glubb's tenure as commander of the Arab Legion, Shaikh Hamad told Tripp that Jordanians serving as soldiers or in instructional posts might react poorly to serving under a British army officer. Tripp urged Shaikh Hamad to keep up a discreet surveillance over the Jordanians. If a situation arose, Tripp warned, whereby King Hussein's authority was challenged in Jordan, the repercussions for the Jordanian troops serving in the Bahraini forces could be serious.<sup>960</sup> Why not, Tripp suggested, place the nominal control of the force in the hands of one of the Al Khalifah with the training and administrative responsibilities delegated to a British officer? Tripp failed to persuade Shaikh Hamad.<sup>961</sup> In latter half of 1968, the new Jordanian commander of the National Guard, Colonel Rushdi, and his training team arrived. They were greeted by Shaikh Hamad in the new National Guard uniform. He was flanked by his British advisers, Colonel St John Hammersely (former commandant of the Bahrain State Police) and Gerald Green (a close confidant of the Al Khalifah family who was one of the security experts brought in 1956 to reform the Bahraini security apparatus).<sup>962</sup>

Although British officers would not be in the cockpit of this new force, Britain nonetheless tried to influence its shape. Brigadier Ivor Hollyer, Commander British Land Forces Gulf (CBLFG), authored a proposal for the size and structure of the National Guard. Hollyer recommended an infantry battalion group with small support elements of armoured cars, artillery and helicopters.<sup>963</sup> The Ruler agreed that this was precisely the kind of force he wanted and hoped it could be ready by the time British forces left in 1971. In terms of recruitment, the Ruler proposed 1,000 tribesmen should arrive en masse and be moulded altogether into a modern force by the Jordanian training team. A triumvirate of the Political Agent, Brigadier Hollyer and Shaikh Hamad convinced the Ruler that it would be better to form a nucleus of 100 trained, experienced men and

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<sup>960</sup> Ibid.

<sup>961</sup> TNA FCO 8/2417 R M. Tesh (British Ambassador to Bahrain) 'Background Paper on the Bahrain Defence Force', May 1975. This was attached to: Ibid. R. M. Tesh (British Ambassador to Bahrain) to Ivor Lucas (Foreign Office) regarding the Bahrain Defence Force, 21 June 1975.

<sup>962</sup> Alfred Hastings St. John Hammersely retired as Police Commandant in 1961.

<sup>963</sup> Ivor Hollyer stayed on in Bahrain until 1998, establishing a construction and engineering firm.

then gradually build up the rifle companies around them.<sup>964</sup> When recruitment began for the National Guard, British officials were surprised at the number of applicants. The 600 volunteers staggered Anthony Parsons who held the conviction that the Bahrainis were 'scarcely a martial race'.<sup>965</sup> Parsons relayed his thoughts back to London as to why the new National Guard was able to attract Bahraini recruits when the State Police had struggled to do so for decades.

[T]he romantic vision of defending the fatherland against the Iranian hordes (bolstered by the probability of never in fact having to do anything so appallingly dangerous) coupled with the pay and with the fact that a soldier does not, like a policeman, have to go around arresting people and otherwise making himself unpopular, have combined to make the National Guard a more attractive profession than the Bahrain State Police.<sup>966</sup>

Shaikh Hamad recalls in his military history of Bahrain, *First Light*, that: 'We had hardly started recruiting when the youth of the country came forward in such large numbers that I was overwhelmed with delight. How I wished we could take everyone who presented himself for interview before the recruitment board.'<sup>967</sup> Shaikh Hamad does not mention that the British-led Special Branch weeded out dozens of what it considered 'radicals' from the first batch of volunteers, suspecting them of being members of the subversive National Liberation Front (NLF) trying to infiltrate the force.<sup>968</sup> In addition, the Ruler dispersed his Bedouin retainers amongst the ranks as loyal ballast in the force. The Bahraini government had a firm idea about which recruits were acceptable. The number of Shia could not exceed more than a quarter of the force and none from this community could make the rank of officer. By 1969, the recruitment and training of Bahraini officers was under way. Most officers received their training in Jordan, but a handful had been instructed at the British cadet school of Mons.<sup>969</sup>

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<sup>964</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office) regarding talks with the Ruler on plans for a defence force, 8 March 1968.

<sup>965</sup> TNA FCO 8/1014, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to D.J. McCarthy (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain National Guard,' 22 October, 1968.

<sup>966</sup> Ibid.

<sup>967</sup> Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah, *First Light* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994), p. 72.

<sup>968</sup> TNA FCO 8/1014, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to D.J. McCarthy (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain National Guard,' 22 October, 1968.

<sup>969</sup> Ibid. Two others were trained at the military college in Iraq.

British Headquarters Land Forces Gulf in Bahrain provided essential equipment to allow basic training for 150 new recruits to begin in October 1968. The Political Agency thought this helped Bahrain achieve 'something of a miracle in getting the National Guard off the ground in 1968'.<sup>970</sup> However, Britain limited its involvement with the force. Parsons, for example, did not take the force seriously, believing it to be 'rather Ruritarian' with the officers, including Shaikh Hamad, 'prancing about in expensive uniforms'.<sup>971</sup> Even after the National Guard was expanded 1969 and renamed the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), British officials played down its usefulness, arguing that it would, at any rate, eventually be absorbed into a federal military structure once Bahrain formed a political union with Qatar and the Trucial States.

In pursuing its agenda to remain the chief provider of defence equipment to the region after withdrawal, Britain should provide Bahrain, Parsons argued, with arms at cut-down prices:

[A]nything we provide now as either a gift or at reduced prices and on easy terms will be bread on the waters. It may not be a very large order but we should in this way be able to secure continuing exports to the Bahrain Defence Force and, by extension, the Bahrain State Police, for the foreseeable future. If we fail to come up to scratch the Ruler will turn immediately to the clamouring agents of West European arms manufacturers such as the French and Italians, and we shall be shouldered aside.<sup>972</sup>

Supporting the BDF, and more broadly the Bahrain state as a whole, through this difficult period was for Anthony Parsons 'not only a point of honour' but was

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<sup>970</sup> Ibid, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to D. J. McCarthy (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain National Guard', 19 December 1968.

<sup>971</sup> As far as Parsons could see, the Jordanian commander's main duty appeared to be to accompany Shaikh Hamad to social functions. But Parsons also acknowledged that Shaikh Hamad took a keen interest in the Guard, doing 10-mile route marches with the recruits and kept regular office hours. Parsons also considered the Jordanian commander, Colonel Rushdi, to be a very good officer and one who was on excellent terms with the headquarters staff of Britain's forces in the Gulf in Bahrain. 'There are two stories current: one that Rushdi's soldiery heart is so pained by the light-hearted and pleasure-loving attitude of the Al Khalifah that he is on the point of resignation; the other that he is on to such a good thing that he is contemplating asking for Bahraini nationality and command of the National Guard as a permanent job!' TNA FCO 8/1014, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to D. J. McCarthy (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain National Guard', 22 October, 1968.

<sup>972</sup> TNA FCO 8/542, A.D. Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office) regarding talks with the Ruler on plans for a defence force, 8 March 1968.

crucial for Britain's future relationship with the Al Khalifah.<sup>973</sup> The advantages of providing succour were that it would 'greatly further our political, defence, and commercial interests in the short, medium, and long-term.'<sup>974</sup> Recognising that the loss of income associated with the British military presence would hit the Bahraini economy hard, Britain assisted in and partly paid for a number of infrastructure projects, perhaps most notably the development of an airfield capable of receiving commercial jet aircraft.<sup>975</sup>

### **6.3 British Conservatives and the Formation of a Residual Policy for Security, 1970-1**

Whilst in opposition the Conservatives were vocal critics of the Labour government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf and announced that if they regained power they would reverse it. Conservative leader, Edward Heath, orated to an audience in Inverness, Scotland, soon after the withdrawal announcement, that his party were 'resolved that Britain should go on helping to keep the peace when her own interests require it and where her friends want her to stay.'<sup>976</sup> The Foreign Office tried to convince Heath that the decision, whether right or wrong, had set in train political developments that could not be reversed. Heath refused to accept this logic and restated his commitment to discuss with the rulers in the area the possibility of a continued British military presence.<sup>977</sup> Moreover, Heath claimed that the rulers of Dubai and Sharjah were still emphatically in favour of retaining British forces and that the Ruler of Qatar wanted a defence treaty with Britain.<sup>978</sup>

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<sup>973</sup> Ibid.

<sup>974</sup> TNA CAB 165/815, A.D Parsons (Political Agent, Bahrain) to Foreign Office, 'Meeting with Shaikh Khalifah', 14 November 1968. Parsons believed that Bahrain would accept an offer from Britain if it entailed the guarantee that the Ministry for Public Buildings and Works would complete the job by mid-1971. Otherwise the job would go to an American contractor.

<sup>975</sup> TNA CAB 165/814, Robin Hooper (Cabinet official) to N.C C. Trench, 'The Bahrain Economy and the Problems of the Persian Gulf', 28 October 1968. Because of the Chancellor's comments, Sir Robin Hooper believed that the 'auguries [for Bahrain] are therefore poor.'

<sup>976</sup> Speech at Inverness, 11 September 1968. TNA PREM 15/539 'Conservative quotes on withdrawal' (Requested by the Prime Minister delivered by the Conservative Research Department), file undated.

<sup>977</sup> TNA FO 1016/756, Foreign Office to British Embassy (Tehran), 25 March 1969.

<sup>978</sup> Ibid, Bahrain Residency to Foreign Office, 'Visit of Mr Edward Heath,' 9 April 1969

Despite his enthusiasm for keeping troops in the area, Heath agreed not to make any announcement that could destabilise the talks on unification of the protected states and the formation of unified armed forces. In general, British representatives were openly hostile to the idea of a reversal and criticised the uncertainty that such talk was creating. Edward Henderson, the new Political Agent in Qatar, offered a middle course between stationing troops and a complete withdrawal. He proposed in April 1969 a new defence relationship that entailed embedding liaison units with the local armed forces and keeping up a ready supply of seconded and contract British military officers and personnel. Because in his opinion internal threats were more pronounced in the region than external ones, he believed that the presence of British troops would only accentuate the possibility of local subversion taking root. To that end, Henderson recommended maintaining a quick reaction force of British troops stationed on the Masirah Island. Henderson argued that it would be far better for Britain to offer a defence commitment to the protected states beyond 1971 that would,

[. . .] retain in unwritten form important aspects of our present special position, and our influence: from this could come a capability to continue to help the local forces and influence their policies. Unless we can do this, these states might simply break up and anarchy ensues.<sup>979</sup>

The Conservatives may or may not have seen Henderson's proposals, but they took up the substance of his recommendations upon taking power in the general election in June 1970.<sup>980</sup>

The first Conservative policy statements after victory at the 1970 general election stated that the government 'would discuss with leaders in the Gulf and other interested countries on how Britain can best contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in the area'.<sup>981</sup> It also claimed that the new government would undertake an immediate re-evaluation of the previous government's

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<sup>979</sup> TNA FCO 1016/756 'HMG's Policy in the Lower Gulf,' Political Agency (Qatar) to Bahrain Residency, 26 April 1969.

<sup>980</sup> Michael Chichester and John Wilkinson, *The Uncertain Ally: British Defence Policy, 1960-1990* (Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing, 1982), p. 36.

<sup>981</sup> *Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy 1970*, [Cmnd 4521] (London: HMSO, October 1970) pp. 4-5.

decision on complete withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971.<sup>982</sup> This put the Prime Minister at odds with his Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Douglas-Home sympathised with Heath's position, but was more aligned with Britain's representatives in the Gulf who considered a reversal at this stage next to impossible. The Foreign Secretary tried to steer a course between Labour's policy of cutting the protected states loose (as he saw it) and Heath's desire to reverse the decision.<sup>983</sup> Douglas-Home aimed, the historian Wm Roger Louis notes, 'to move forward towards union of the seven Trucial States without Bahrain and Qatar, and to retain rather than break the military and economic links.'<sup>984</sup> In order to guide this policy on the ground Douglas-Home appointed former Political Resident Sir William Luce as his special envoy.<sup>985</sup> Luce's role is best remembered in helping to force through the political logjam in forming the United Arab Emirates (albeit minus Bahrain, Qatar, and, for some weeks, Ras al-Khaimah).<sup>986</sup> For one scholar, the appointment of Luce represented one of the Heath government's 'most important and wisest' decisions.<sup>987</sup> Less well known is Luce's involvement in formulating Britain's policy for a residual security presence in the Gulf, and in successfully convincing sceptical politicians of the Conservative Party's imperialist wing to adopt it.<sup>988</sup>

Douglas-Home believed that any future British role in the Gulf had to be *indirect* so that Britain 'could exercise the maximum political influence with the minimum British presence.'<sup>989</sup> Heath, however, still wanted to consider a *direct*

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<sup>982</sup> Balfour-Paul (1994) p. 128; and Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p. 482.

<sup>983</sup> Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (Glasgow, UK: William Collins, 1976), p. 259.

<sup>984</sup> Louis (2003), p. 99.

<sup>985</sup> TNA PREM 15/538, Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary) to Edward Heath (Prime Minister), 'Consultations with the Shah,' 13 July 1970. Douglas-Home recommended that 'since the problems of the Gulf are complicated, inter-connected and urgent I have had it in mind to appoint from outside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office a co-ordinator who would take charge of trying to sort out these issues without other responsibilities. I think William Luce would be the best choice'. *Ibid.*

<sup>986</sup> See Anthony Parsons' Foreword in Balfour-Paul (1994).

<sup>987</sup> W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 187.

<sup>988</sup> Lord [Peter] Carrington, *Reflecting on Things Past* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 218.

<sup>989</sup> TNA FCO 7/1828, Memorandum of Conversation between Rogers (US Secretary of State) and Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary), 11 July 1970.

continued presence. Before Sir William Luce departed for his multiple rounds of discussions in the Gulf, Heath tasked him with testing the water with the rulers regarding stationing some British forces in the region beyond 1971. 'For obvious reasons neither the local rulers nor the Shah of Iran were likely to say publicly that they wished us to stay,' Heath told Luce. Confidential discussions were for Heath another matter.<sup>990</sup> Thus the Prime Minister believed that one of Luce's important tasks was 'to ensure that there had been genuine consultation with the local rulers and others, and to elicit what they really thought.'<sup>991</sup> During his shuttling to and from the Gulf over the summer and autumn of 1970, all the ruling families except the Al Thani told Luce that they wanted Britain to continue its presence beyond 1971 and sign new British defence commitments to replace the protective treaties. Luce did not recommend that Britain agree to these wishes, but he did provide a route map for Britain to remain involved in the security affairs of Eastern Arabia after 1971.

Delivered in November 1970, Luce's report questioned the utility of maintaining fighting units in the Gulf beyond 1971. At the heart of this critique was Luce's point that there could be no realistic thought given to military intervention if either Iran or Saudi Arabia pressed their territorial claims by force. As for keeping the British defence architecture in place to defend Kuwait from Iraqi aggression, Luce felt that the threat was less real than that of 'subversion and revolution by Arab nationalist and left-wing elements against the traditional regimes, and their encouragement and exploitation by Russia and possibly China.'<sup>992</sup> Indeed, against Heath's inclination to station troops beyond 1971, Luce argued that the 'presence of a British battalion will not deter the threat [from subversive groups], indeed it could encourage it.' Heath underlined this last sentence, penning his disagreement to Luce's argument in the margin.<sup>993</sup> Luce's report went on to reason that British forces could only act as 'a stimulus and focus to subversive organisations who will increasingly concentrate their activities against the British presence and against the governments of Bahrain

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<sup>990</sup> TNA PREM 15/538, Minutes of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 'The Persian Gulf', 22 July 1970

<sup>991</sup> Ibid.

<sup>992</sup> PREM 15/538, Report by William Luce, 'Policy in the Persian Gulf: Part 1,' 4 November 1970.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid.

and the Union for permitting it.<sup>994</sup> After the meeting of deputy rulers on 24-26 October 1970 ended in failure, Britain assumed that Bahrain would in due course decide to become an independent state with Qatar likely following suit.<sup>995</sup> Whatever political future the protected states took, Luce was confident that stationing troops after 1971 carried with it the risk of involving Britain 'in an escalating and fruitless internal security role.' With the experiences of Aden and South Arabia fresh in mind, he warned against potentially forcing Britain into a situation where it would have to choose between 'reinforcement and ignominious withdrawal.'<sup>996</sup> So how did Luce believe Britain could contribute to the security of the region after 1971 without stationing fighting forces?

Though Luce opposed maintaining troops in the Gulf, he recognised that there was a desire among the local rulers for continuing British support, and proposed a string of measures by which Britain could play a residual security role. Britain could, he suggested, be on hand to counsel the rulers in times of emergency. Britain might also maintain small Royal Navy and RAF contingents to facilitate ship visits and service British military aircraft staging through the region. Furthermore, liaison teams from all three services of the British armed forces could provide coaching to indigenous forces and coordinate arms purchases. Moreover, Britain could send combat units to undertake joint training with their local counterparts. In Luce's view, the means by which Britain could best maintain influence, and contribute most towards stability, was 'to continue to loan officers and other British personnel to the forces of the Union [he thought at this stage there was a small chance Qatar might join as well] and of Bahrain'. British officers holding key positions in these local forces were for Luce, 'a stronger safeguard against military revolt than the presence of British battalions.'<sup>997</sup> This tallied with the thinking of the Political Agent in the Trucial States, Julian Bullard, who was sure that after 1971 Britain would,

[. . .] retain uniquely special opportunities to influence affairs [in the Trucial States], even after the formal trappings have gone, by virtue of our long political experience and entrenched position of British subjects in the local security forces, in the rulers' administrations

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<sup>994</sup> Ibid.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid.

<sup>996</sup> Ibid.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid.



(such as they are), in the Trucial States Development Office and in trade, contracting and banking.<sup>998</sup>

When the decision to withdrawal was announced, British loan service personnel were concerned that their positions would end. As early as February 1970, however, the British government confirmed that the position of loan personnel would be open-ended and not subject to termination at the end of 1971.<sup>999</sup>

Luce's recommendations went before the Cabinet's Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP) Committee. Before the meeting, the influential Cabinet Secretary, Burke Trend, thought it would be useful for the Prime Minister to consider the main assumptions of Luce's report. First amongst these was that the government would not wish to reverse their predecessor's decision to end Britain's military presence – an assumption Trend agreed with. He argued to Heath on 10 December 1970 (the day before the meeting) that:

Sir W. Luce's argument [. . .] appear[s] convincing. To continue to station committed forces in the Gulf would prolong the period when, to borrow the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's words, we should be in a position of responsibility without control. With Rhodesia and the Caribbean in mind this is an uninviting prospect.<sup>1000</sup>

The Ministry of Defence believed that Army and RAF training visits and exercises should be encouraged, but was less keen on providing in-country training in liaison teams. Whilst defence officials believed that providing personnel loan personnel to local militaries was, and would be, 'a very effective way of furthering the development of these forces and securing valuable influence,' it cautioned against having its serving officers in key posts of the militaries of foreign states whose policies Britain had little control over. Could they realistically have their duties limited to exclude their employment in hostilities such as war between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of

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<sup>998</sup> TNA FCO 8/1570, Political Resident to Foreign Secretary, 'Persian Gulf: Annual Review for 1970,' 1 January 1971.

<sup>999</sup> TNA DEFE 25/244, Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Military Coordination Committee Gulf, 12 February 1970. This was specifically in regards to the ADDF, but it can be assumed that this policy stood for the other Emirate armed forces as well. Parsons wanted factual information on the strength and function of the Kuwaiti Liaison Team (KLT); the number of British contract and seconded personnel in the police, army, other government departments in Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE; and details of the British involvement in Oman from Colonel Oldman downwards.

<sup>1000</sup> TNA PREM 15/538, Burke Trend (Cabinet Secretary) to Edward Heath (Prime Minister), 'Policy in the Persian Gulf,' 10 December 1970.

Defence pondered?<sup>1001</sup> Douglas-Home wanted British defence officials to appreciate the political advantages of positioning liaison and training teams in the Gulf states after 1971.<sup>1002</sup>

Despite the amendments, Luce's broad conclusions, which taken together constituted a policy for ensuring a residual influence, were accepted by Heath and the Cabinet. Although Heath had been strongly in favour of continuing to station at least a battalion in the Gulf he did not force his opinion on this matter.<sup>1003</sup> As historian Wm Roger Louis, observes:

Heath believed along with Julian Amery and others of the imperialist wing of the Conservative Party that Britain could continue to station battalions and hold enclaves regardless of world opinion. But in this respect Heath was like Churchill and did not override his military and political advisors.<sup>1004</sup>

When Douglas-Home formally reaffirmed Britain's commitment to withdrawal its forces by the end of 1971 in a speech to the House of Commons in March 1971, he also used the occasion to extol the merits of Luce's recommendations for maintaining a residual influence. Douglas-Home told the assembled Members of Parliament that the arrangements would 'form a sound basis for a continuing and effective British contribution to the stability of the area'.<sup>1005</sup>

With Bahrain and Qatar electing on independence, Britain expended much of its diplomatic energy over the course of 1971 trying to form a union of the seven Trucial shajhdoms. As part of its efforts, the British government wanted to transfer the TOS to this new political entity. Britain asked former TOS commander Freddie De Butts to be the new link between the Trucial states rulers and the British Government in the military field. De Butts explains his role in his memoirs:

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<sup>1001</sup> TNA FCO 8/1324, Memorandum by Peter Carrington (Defence Secretary) to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 'Policy in the Persian Gulf,' 28 December 1970

<sup>1002</sup> TNA PREM 15/538, Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary) to Edward Heath (Prime Minister), 'Persian Gulf Policy,' 1 January 1971.

<sup>1003</sup> Whilst Lord Carrington records in his memoirs that there was no real prospect of reversing the east of Suez decision it has been shown here that Heath did take the idea of maintaining a permanent military presence in the Gulf seriously. See: Carrington (1988), pp. 218-219.

<sup>1004</sup> Louis (2003) p. 102

<sup>1005</sup> *United Kingdom Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, Volume 812* (London: HMSO, 1971), 1 March 1971, cols 1227-9.

The TOS were about to become the Union Defence Force (UDF). I was required to recommend its shape and size on Independence Day (only two and a half months away) to the Rulers, and to estimate what it would cost as they and not HMG would be paying.<sup>1006</sup>

Despite working to a close deadline, De Butts secured agreement from the rulers in November 1971 that the size of the UDF would be at brigade strength (roughly 3000 men) and would include an armoured reconnaissance squadron of scout cars. Though De Butts had tacit approval for this concept from the rulers, this did not stop them carrying on with the formation of their own individual forces. 'The problem in a nutshell', De Butts recalls,

[. . .] was that though Rulers agreed that the former TOS should become a federal force of about brigade strength, several wanted to copy the Abu Dhabi example and have their own small private armies as well. It made them feel safer now that the British umbrella was removed. I could only stand on the touch line and advise on shape and size.<sup>1007</sup>

One of Sir William Luce's chief arguments against continuing to station regular troops in the region was that they would act as a lightning rod for subversive forces in the area. In his mind, the only effective means available to counter these groups, aside from sound government, was 'efficient intelligence and security service.'<sup>1008</sup> In the lead up to December 1971, Britain tried to put in place a Gulf-wide local system for counter-subversion efforts that would remain in place after its exit.

## **6.4 Gulf-wide Local System for Counter-Subversion**

Britain's decision to accelerate its withdrawal from the region made building up local capabilities to deal with subversion and internal threats more important. In an effort to improve the police forces in the Gulf before its departure, the Foreign Office sent a policing expert, Mr L.A. Hicks, to the protected states for a fortnight in February 1968 to audit the existing measures. Hicks found the

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<sup>1006</sup> The appointment was initially that of Director Military Liaison Office (DMLO), later to become Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defence UAE. De Butts (1995), p. 229.

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

<sup>1008</sup> TNA PREM 15/538 Report by William Luce, 'Policy in the Persian Gulf: Part 1,' 4 November 1970.

security forces to be in a varied state of readiness. He felt that the Bahrain State Police were well led under its British commandant, Bell, and that the Special Branch, comprising six experienced British police officers, and led by Ian Henderson, was particularly strong. He did not see, especially after the State Police had formed its own mobile force with a new batch of modern rifles and smoke grenades, an internal security problem developing in Bahrain that the police could not handle. The Qatari security forces, at the time of Hicks' visit, consisted of a Defence Force of 1,100 men and a police force of 1,080 men. Both forces were under the command of Mohammad Mahdi who had 12 British police officers under him.<sup>1009</sup> Once plans were enacted for creating a police mobile force, Hicks believed Qatar would also be in position to deal quickly with civil disturbances.<sup>1010</sup> Hicks painted a less positive picture of the policing situation in the Trucial States.

Out of the seven Trucial shaikhdoms, only the 430-man Dubai Police in Hicks' eyes were of much value.<sup>1011</sup> In contrast, Hicks found the 57-man Sharjah Police Force, commanded by J.I. Burns, starved of funds. Burns had plans to expand the police to 108 men but lacked resources to do so.<sup>1012</sup> The slightly larger Ras al-Khaimah Police Force (three officers and 120 policemen), commanded by the British policeman A.T. Bevan (joined May 1967), functioned, according to Hicks, like little more than a palace guard. Moreover, the Ruler, Shaikh Saqr, had denied it funds and even had sold off some of its vehicles. Like Burns, Bevan had no contract, no house, and no educational allowance for his children. In Abu Dhabi, the de facto commander, Barham (the British deputy), also had to fight for even the most basic equipment for the police, which by 1968 had grown to 650 men. Here Hicks recognised the problem as being one of family politics. Because Shaikh Zayed did not trust his nephew (Shaikh Mubarak bin Mohammad), who was the commandant, he deliberately

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<sup>1009</sup> R. Lock was the police commandant.

<sup>1010</sup> TNA FCO 8/96, Report by L.A. Hicks (Deputy Overseas Police Adviser), 'The Police and Security Forces of Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States,' 29 February 1968.

<sup>1011</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1012</sup> Burns' life was tumultuous; he had lived in seven houses since he had arrived and was not in receipt of a proper contract.

neglected the force.<sup>1013</sup> In turn, Shaikh Mubarak forbade Barham from speaking directly with Shaikh Zayed.<sup>1014</sup> Hicks accused Barham of not fighting hard enough to achieve direct access to the Ruler. The Residency agreed with Hicks' recommendation that a younger man – Barham was 57-years-old – should be appointed when the Deputy Commandant's contract expired. Britain wanted Abu Dhabi to agree to increase the cadre of British officers. Unlike the regular police, the Abu Dhabi Special Branch was allotted its own lavish budget and granted its British commander private access whenever he asked for it.<sup>1015</sup> As Hicks noted, the 'success and efficiency of the police forces in the Gulf depend very largely on the type of personal relationship that the Commandant of Police enjoys with the local ruler.'<sup>1016</sup>

One month after the British announcement that it would withdraw from the area by the end of 1971, Hicks concluded that Britain must get more and not less involved in the local police forces. In addition to recommending the appointment of further British Special Branch and investigation officers for Qatar and Dubai, Hicks recommended that Britain provide budgetary aid to the Sharjah Police to help it expand and to Ras al-Khaimah to forestall its collapse.<sup>1017</sup> The Treasury, however, rejected Hicks' calls to assist Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah police forces. In the east coast shaikhdom of Fujairah, it was Abu Dhabi and not Britain that was assisting the Ruler, Shaikh Mohammad, with establishing a police force by training recruits in al-Ain. Shaikh Mohammad did ask Britain for modern self-loading rifles (SLR), but because Britain suspected they would be for his bodyguard rather than the police it offered him old .303 models instead.<sup>1018</sup> Shaikh Mohammad continued to insist that he needed the

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<sup>1013</sup> TNA FCO 8/96, Report by L.A. Hicks (Deputy Overseas Police Adviser), 'The Police and Security Forces of Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States,' 29 February 1968.

<sup>1014</sup> TNA FCO 8/833, A.T. Lamb (Political Agent, Abu Dhabi) to D.A. Roberts (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Sheikh Zaid bin Sultan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi,' 1 March 1967.

<sup>1015</sup> TNA FCO 8/96, R.J.W. Craig (Bahrain Residency) to P.H.C Eyres (Foreign Office), 22 March 1968.

<sup>1016</sup> TNA FCO 8/96, Report by L.A. Hicks (Deputy Overseas Police Adviser), 'The Police and Security Forces of Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States,' 29 February 1968.

<sup>1017</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1018</sup> TNA FCO 8/1264, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Fujairah Police Force', 10 December 1968.

SLRs.<sup>1019</sup> That Qatar and Abu Dhabi had already offered Fujairah these weapons – and had already delivered some – displayed Britain’s weakened position when it came to controlling the spread of arms. ‘In asking for our permission to have these weapons,’ Bullard wrote to the Residency, ‘the Ruler is really asking us to legitimise a *fait accompli*.’<sup>1020</sup> Shaikh Mohammad also asked Britain for a British officer to command the police. Britain, however, believed the force was too small to justify this expenditure.<sup>1021</sup>

Although the outgoing Political Resident, Sir Stewart Crawford, believed Britain had been able to affect considerable improvement over 1968-70 in the leadership of the local police forces, especially in their Special Branches, he was nonetheless concerned about the growing threats in the Gulf and the local capacity to deal with them. In his valedictory report in July 1970, he concluded:

Omens for the future are however less encouraging. The police cover is thin; potential subversives are growing in number, especially with the increased flow of Palestinians into the Trucial States; the Iraq Government is beginning to penetrate the area, so far mainly by overt methods but undoubtedly with the intent of later promoting activities against the rulers and perhaps against our forces; there are signs that the various subversive groups may now be drawing together under the umbrella of a single organisation with a better chance of producing a coordinated effort than previous such attempts.<sup>1022</sup>

Events in 1970 seemed to change the impressions of both the local rulers and Britain’s representatives about the growing subversive threats in Dubai and the smaller Trucial States. ‘[I]f 1970 is to have a label,’ the Political Agent in Dubai, Julian Bullard, wrote in his survey of events over the past year, ‘it might be called the year in which the limitations of British power in the Lower Gulf began

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<sup>1019</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), ‘Fujairah Police Force’, 25 January 1969.

<sup>1020</sup> TNA FCO 8/1264, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), ‘Fujairah Police’, 8 April 1969; and Ibid, T.J. Everard (Bahrain Residency) to J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States), 14 April 1969.

<sup>1021</sup> Ibid, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain), ‘Fujairah Police Force’, 7 January 1969.

<sup>1022</sup> TNA FCO 8/1318, ‘Valedictory Despatch from Stewart Crawford (Political Resident) to Foreign Secretary, 25 July 1970 (Received 3 August 1970).

to be exposed.<sup>1023</sup> The assassination attempt on the Ruler of Sharjah on the 17 July (an explosive device detonated underneath his empty chair in the *majlis*) in particular brought the dangers home. The fact that a Sharjah Police constable who had served in the TOS was implicated in the attack showed the need for local security services with a long intelligence reach. British officials believed that the individual was not acting alone but was part of a subversive cell. The local Special Branch teams sprang into action making arrests; the TOS assisted by blocking roads. British officials wanted to use the 'present atmosphere' created by the assassination attempt 'to encourage the Rulers to improve their security apparatus.'<sup>1024</sup> Julian Bullard reflected on how the attempt on the Ruler's life had changed thinking in the area:

I once had told your predecessor, in jest but also with perfect truth, that our troubles with subversive elements were nothing compared to our troubles with the temperamental officers of the Special Branch. 1970 changed all that. The turning point was a single week in mid-July, when a bomb exploded under the Ruler's chair in Sharjah – it would certainly have killed him had he kept to his usual timetable that morning – and six suspected members of the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf (NDFLOAG) were arrested.<sup>1025</sup>

For Bullard, the attack was only a sign of worse things to come. He warned that, 'the Rulers [of the northern states and Dubai] must either take measures for their own security, or perish. At the moment the second looks much the likelier alternative.' After Britain's special position in the Lower Gulf ended, Bullard warned the Political Resident,

[. . .] the Trucial States will be exposed to the full force of subversive influences, native and foreign. Their only defence will be the police and Special Branches, including the British-controlled Northern Trucial States Special Branch and Bureau if these are handed over

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<sup>1023</sup> TNA FCO 8/1536, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to Political Resident, 'Annual Review of Dubai and the Northern Trucial States for 1970,' 10 December 1970.

<sup>1024</sup> TNA FCO 8/1511, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Operation against NDFLOAG,' 23 July 1970.

<sup>1025</sup> TNA FCO 8/1536, J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States) to Political Resident, 'Annual Review of Dubai and the Northern Trucial States for 1970,' 10 December 1970.

to the Rulers at that time; in the background they may have a defence force or forces of some kind.<sup>1026</sup>

The most glaring shortcomings were in Bullard's mind in those states where the rulers were least likely to remedy them by themselves. He therefore recommended that Britain double its help to these rulers now while it still had influence and before they began to receive advice from less friendly sources. Apart from information exchanges between British police officers, there was a lack of cooperation between the various states. 'Even a central office coordinating the work of the nine state police forces is something beyond reasonable expectation,' Bullard lamented. Britain wanted to codify the practice of regular meetings between the various police commandants in the Trucial States so that it would remain in place after withdrawal.<sup>1027</sup> Moreover, Bullard thought it would be 'the height of folly' if the intelligence bureau at Sharjah Fort was not kept going after 1971. He worried also about the future of the Northern Trucial States Special Branch (NTSSB) after Britain's exit. Staffed by four expatriates, including two British officers, and also housed in the Sharjah Police force, the NTSSB supervised the small Special Branch sections in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. It also operated on its own in Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, and Fujairah. 'The need for this kind of work is obviously going to increase in 1971 and after, but British withdrawal will leave the NTSSB without a political umbrella,' the Political Agent continued. After speaking with all the commandants and heads of the intelligence bureau and NTSSB, Bullard proposed a range of measures, including additional staff, a new police radio centre, and a dedicated Special Branch adviser. In late 1970, he asked the Foreign Office lobby for funds for these improvements into 1972.<sup>1028</sup> The

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<sup>1026</sup> TNA FCO 8/1692, M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency) to A.A. Acland (Foreign Office), 'UK Policy in the Gulf: Police and Special Branches,' 30 December 1970, enclosing report by J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Police and Special Branches in the Northern Trucial States After 1971,' undated.

<sup>1027</sup> In one of the final meetings of its kind, the following officers attended on 17 October 1971: A.S. Barham (Acting Director PSLD); Lt. Khalifa Mohammad Khalifa (Ajman Police); Lt. Hunsli Za'rab (Umm al-Quwain Police); Major Budd (TOS); J.I. Burns (Commandant of Sharjah Police); A.T. Bevan (Commandant of RAK Police); D. Ledger (Fujairah Police); J. Briggs (Commandant of Dubai Police).

<sup>1028</sup> TNA FCO 8/1692, M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency) to A.A. Acland (Foreign Office), 'UK Policy in the Gulf: Police and Special Branches,' 30 December 1970, enclosing report by J.L. Bullard (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Police and Special Branches in the Northern Trucial States After 1971,' undated.



Residency gave Bullard's report its backing and hoped that the British government's claims that it would continue to assist the police forces and Special Branches units after 1971 would translate into action.<sup>1029</sup>

With the impending dissolution of the NTSSB upon Britain's exit, the Political Agency proposed as a replacement measure the strengthening of the police and Special Branches in Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah and the establishment of small Special Branches in the three northern shaikhdoms where the main weaknesses in the security system were identified. The Agency thought it was 'of considerable importance that these weaknesses be remedied before the end of 1971 if possible.'<sup>1030</sup> The Residency and Foreign Office agreed 'that a continuing British contribution to Police and Special Branches in the Trucial States, and in particular the provision of British personnel, will play an important part in achieving our basic policy aim of maintaining the stability of the Gulf.'<sup>1031</sup> British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, sent the Political Agency in the Trucial States a letter on 18 March 1971 in which he made no commitment to a continuing financial contribution from Britain to the Trucial States security forces after withdrawal. Instead, Douglas-Home wanted to see more collective action taken by the rulers and funds channelled through a new department of Trucial States Council to local address local security issues. It is worth detailing Douglas-Home's direction in full:

In putting forward this idea to the Rulers you should stress, that in our view, internal subversion is likely to prove the most serious immediate threat facing them at the end of this year. The importance of adequately equipped and trained police forces and special branches in dealing with this threat cannot be overemphasised. Some of the Rulers already have made useful progress in developing their counter-subversion forces but others have given little thought to the subject. The subversion threat cannot, in our view, be adequately met, except on an inter-state basis.<sup>1032</sup>

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<sup>1029</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1030</sup> TNA FCO 8/1692, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to P.R.H. Wright (Bahrain Residency), 'UK Policy in the Gulf: Police and Special Branches,' 4 February 1971.

<sup>1031</sup> Ibid, P.R.H. Wright (Bahrain Residency) to J.M. Edes (Foreign Office), 'UK Policy in the Gulf: Police and Special Branches,' 9 February 1971.

<sup>1032</sup> TNA FCO 8/1692, Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary) to Political Agency (Trucial States), 18 March 1971.

In sum, Douglas-Home wanted the rulers to pay and wanted the Political Agency to enlist the support of the British police officers employed in the Gulf forces to push the line that cooperation and joint action was needed. Yet the Foreign Secretary's own department continued its appeal to the Treasury for funds for the local police forces. One foreign office mandarin, A.A. Acland, put forward the following argument to the Treasury at the end of March 1971:

The last thing any of us want to do is to spend money unnecessarily. We are all convinced however that improvement of the local police forces is vital as a *British* [original emphasis] interest, and that if we are to have a chance of making progress we must be in a position to offer some financial help if this proves necessary.<sup>1033</sup>

Acland reminded the Treasury of Britain's political, commercial and economic interests in the Gulf. It was an area important to sterling and one, because of its oil supplies, which was critical to the functioning of the British economy. If the subversive threat to the northern Trucial States, which the rulers themselves were unable to counter unaided, developed and spread, it could affect other neighbouring areas of the Gulf where British economic and commercial interests were very large. Acland balanced the huge potential risks posed by Gulf subversion against the small sums proposed to protect these interests.<sup>1034</sup> The British government had, at any rate, already committed itself to a policy of doing all it could to help build-up, train and supply local police forces and in particular to their security and intelligence branches before British withdrawal. Douglas-Home had confirmed this position in a statement and answer to supplementary questions in the House of Commons on 1 March 1971.

The Foreign Office proposed extending the existing programme of assistance as far as 1976 and adding a supplementary £193,000 per annum to be administered by the Trucial States Council. In the end, the Treasury agreed to over half the money.<sup>1035</sup> The almost 500-strong Sharjah Police would receive £11,069 for the year 1971/2 officer salaries, the majority of which was also for the British commandant's salary. As Abu Dhabi provided financial assistance to Ajman, Umm al-Quwain and Fujairah for their police forces, Britain need not

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<sup>1033</sup> TNA FCO 8/1692, A.A. Acland (Foreign Office) to H.S. Lee (Treasury), 'Assistance to Police Forces and Special Branches in the Gulf,' 31 March 1971.

<sup>1034</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1035</sup> *Ibid.*

make a contribution. But Britain did agree to subsidise Ras al-Khaimah's 220-strong police to the sum of £9,452 per annum and pay the salary of British commandant and other officers. As for the putative Ras al-Khaimah Special Branch, the Political Agent proposed a Jordanian who was already working for the NTSSB. Shaikh Saqr refused, saying he wanted an Englishman, not a Jordanian, and suggested Anthony French Blake a young cavalry officer and former TOS Desert Intelligence Officer in Ras al-Khaimah. The Political Agent tried to dissuade him stating that the Treasury had not provided sufficient funds to cover the cost of an expatriate Special Branch officer, but Saqr stood his ground.<sup>1036</sup> Though French Blake could not be released from his current military post in Britain, Saqr still insisted that he had an Englishman as head of the Special Branch. As he did not want 'a Palestinian, Jordanian or any other foreign Arab,' the Foreign Office recommended that, as 'the improvement of the Special Branch in Ras al-Khaimah, our weak spot as far as subversives on the coast, is vital', Britain should 'fall in with Shaikh Saqr's wishes.'<sup>1037</sup> When the wisdom of giving financial aid to the smaller police forces and special branches in the northern Trucial shajhdoms was again brought into question in the months leading up to withdrawal, A. J. Coles at the Political Agency defended the practice:

Most of the key figures in the internal security forces are British. Without them the security forces would probably fall apart. Sharjah, in particular, is heavily dependent on Burns and Turner. Sharjah's finances were rocky in November 1970 and are now in a very perilous state. If the payment of my salary were dependent on the Ruler of Sharjah I should be looking for another job, particularly if, like Turner, I were married with children at school.

In Coles' mind, the British government should pay Turner's salary and allowances for the following reasons:

It is in British interests that he should stay on since he makes a vital contribution to the security of Sharjah (the probable future home of

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<sup>1036</sup> TNA FCO 8/1630, J.F. Walker, (Political Agency, Trucial States) to Lt. Col. W. Adler (Foreign Office), 'Police and Special Branches,' 27 June 1971.

<sup>1037</sup> Ibid, Lt. Col. W.M.L. Adler (Foreign Office) to J.F. Walker (Political Agency, Trucial States), 'Special Branch: Ras al-Khaimah,' 29 August 1971.

the UAE Defence Force, British military assistance team etc.) and thus to the security of the area in general.<sup>1038</sup>

Britain resurrected the idea of collaboration amongst the police and Special Branches of the protected states in May 1971. The Joint Police Committee, which met on 22 May, agreed to set up a Public Security Liaison Department containing a criminal records office, a liaison function with Interpol, an explosive disposals team and a Special Branch adviser. There was some concern that if Britain paid for the Special Branch adviser the ruling families would suspect that the post was created in order for Britain to collect intelligence. According to Julian Walker at the Trucial States Political Agency, suspicion over the loyalties of British police officers had always been there. 'Briggs [Dubai Police], Burns [Sharjah Police], Bevan [Ras al-Khaimah Police] are all of the opinion that whether or not they are paid for by HMG [Her Majesty's Government], they are regarded as being in British employ, and that Barham [Abu Dhabi Police] and Clemens [Abu Dhabi Special Branch] are certain to be bracketed with them, however much the latter protest.'<sup>1039</sup> Walker promised to do his best to correct any inaccurate suspicions of our motives over the establishment of the Special Branch adviser post. However, the plain fact for Walker was 'that it is still difficult for the Arabs of the Coast to understand that the British are strange creatures, motivated by different impulses than theirs.'<sup>1040</sup>

To appease sensibilities, the idea was to base the headquarters (records, administration, and police gazette) of the Public Security Liaison Department (PSLD) in Abu Dhabi, but have an operational office in Dubai. Britain's plan was for all the police forces of the impending union of the seven Trucial States to be branches of the PSLD. Shaikh Zayed wanted a British police expert to run the force and for Britain to begin looking for someone who had knowledge of police procedures and of the Arab world.<sup>1041</sup> Zayed, however, went on to remark that he would not wish a British expert to remain in the office after the formation of the Union. He would have to leave by the time that

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<sup>1038</sup> TNA FCO 8/1630, A.J. Coles (Political Agency, Trucial States) to Lt. Col. W.M.L. Adler (Foreign Office), 'Aid to Police and Special Branches,' 24 August 1971.

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid, J.F. Walker, (Political Agency, Trucial States) to A. Reeve (Foreign Office), 'Police and Special Branches,' 9 June 1971.

<sup>1040</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1041</sup> TNA FCO 8/1630, A.F. Green (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi) to J.F. Walker (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Public Security Liaison Department,' 8 August 1971.

delegations set out to seek admission into the Arab League otherwise accusations would follow that the new union was merely an imperialist trick.<sup>1042</sup> Since Zayed had British officers in his army – and was intending to keep them beyond 1971 – his comments surprised British officials.<sup>1043</sup> The Political Agent in Abu Dhabi, Treadwell, spoke to Shaikh Zayed about this on 23 September:

He [Shaikh Zayed] seemed at first suspicious about British motives in pressing for the recruitment of these four advisers but upon being satisfied that they would have no executive authority, would be paid for in full by himself and Rashid [Ruler of Dubai] and that they would beholden in no way to HM representatives, agreed that the ODA [Overseas Development Agency] should try to find suitable candidates as a matter of priority.<sup>1044</sup>

When the Union of Arab Emirates (UAE) formed on 2 December 1971, each of the seven emirates kept their own police forces and Special Branches. It would be many years until a federal judicial system would be created in the UAE. In the end, subversive groups did not exploit the uncertainty caused by Britain's departure.

## **6.5 'Quiet Erosion' of the Bahrain Defence Force and Support for the Special Branch, 1971**

As Britain's 1971 departure from the Gulf neared, its representatives in Bahrain began to look upon the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) with some wariness. From inception, Britain had viewed the BDF as an unnecessary drain on Bahrain's resources; by 1970 British officials considered it a potential threat to the ruling regime itself.<sup>1045</sup> British representatives lodged their concerns about unrestrained growth of BDF with the Ruler. Alexander Stirling, who succeeded Parsons as Political Agent in Bahrain, took any even stronger stance against

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<sup>1042</sup> Extract from conversation between Shaikh Zayed (Ruler of Abu Dhabi) and A.F. Green (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), in TNA FCO 8/1630, A.F. Green (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi) to J.F. Walker (Political Agent, Trucial States), 'Public Security Liaison Department,' 29 August 1971.

<sup>1043</sup> TNA FCO 8/1630, J.F. Walker (Political Agent, Trucial States) to A.F. Green (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi), 'Public Security Liaison Department,' 31 August 1971.

<sup>1044</sup> TNA FCO 8/1630, Treadwell (Political Agency, Abu Dhabi) to Bahrain Residency, 25 September 1971.

<sup>1045</sup> TNA FCO 8/2417 R.M. Tesh (British Ambassador to Bahrain), 'Background Paper on the Bahrain Defence Force', May 1975. This was attached to: Letter from R.M. Tesh (British Ambassador to Bahrain) to Ivor Lucas (Foreign Office) regarding the Bahrain Defence Force, 21 June 1975.

the BDF, and thought that it was down to his 'jeremiads' that Shaikh Isa was considering reducing the size of the force. Stirling, warned his Whitehall superiors in March 1971 that 'a handful of BDF could stage a coup at any time and there is precious little we could do except pray that the authorities get wind of it.'<sup>1046</sup> Stirling clearly had officials in London worried. The Foreign Office now agreed that the BDF was not a force for good, but – in a frank admission to Britain's diminishing sway in Bahrain – concluded that there was very little that Britain could do about this.<sup>1047</sup>

Suggestions on what to do were discounted as quickly as they were put forward. A wider spread of expatriates (Kuwaitis or Pakistanis) among the BDF's officers could help, one official opined, but it may have been too late for a diversification effort of this kind. A British Liaison Team on the lines of that in Kuwait would not be met with much enthusiasm in Bahrain, the Foreign Office concluded. At any rate, 'if the rot has already set in, this might simply result in the [Liaison] Team's becoming a first target for the Baathists if they decided the moment had come to take over.'<sup>1048</sup>

Unable to decide how to tackle the issue of the BDF, the Foreign Office sought counsel from the former Political Agent, Parsons, who was in a new position at the Foreign Office in Whitehall. Parsons broadly agreed with Stirling: the BDF in his mind had 'no positive value whatever in the Island in any circumstances'. Since it was composed entirely of Bahraini rank-and-file (the opposite of the State Police which comprised mostly non-Bahrainis) 'it would never act except against the regime in an internal security situation and it is inconceivable to imagine it resisting an external attack,' Parsons warned. Shaikh Isa would not cut the BDF nor to disband it, because Parsons judged 'he regards the [BDF] in his heart of hearts as a potential private army designed to act as a counterbalance to the Bahrain State Police.' Fearing his brother, Shaikh Muhammad bin Salman, would use his command of the State Police to try and oust him, the Ruler created the Defence Force, according to Parsons, as a counterweight. If the BDF could not practicably be disbanded, Parsons

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<sup>1046</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, A.J D. Stirling (Political Agency, Bahrain) to P.R.H Wright (Bahrain Residency), 'Bahrain Internal Security,' 25 March 1971.

<sup>1047</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, Note by D.G. Allen (Foreign Office) to Mr Parsons and Mr Allen, 'Bahrain: Internal Security', 14 April 1971.

<sup>1048</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, Note by D.G. Allen, Arabian Department to Mr Parsons and Mr Allen, 'Bahrain: Internal Security', 14 April 1971.

recommended that the Ruler exile his brother Shaikh Muhammad. He also suggested as a remedy that the Ruler should build up the strength of the largely non-Bahraini police and move the BDF away from Riffa town where it was concentrated in an ideal position to overthrow the ruling family.<sup>1049</sup>

Parsons shared his views with the Crown Prince, Shaikh Hamad, when they met at London's Dorchester Hotel in April 1971. He told Hamad straight that the British government feared the force under his command might attempt a coup in the future. In the knowledge that Shaikh Hamad would relay details of the conversation to his father, Parsons repeated his recommendation that, as reconciliation between the Ruler and his brother, Shaikh Muhammad, 'was clearly impossible,' the latter should be sent into exile, leaving command of the State Police to Shaikh Hamad himself. 'So long as Mohammed was living in the Island,' Parsons warned the Crown Prince, 'he would be a focus for discontent.' Parsons does not recount Shaikh Hamad's reaction. We do know that Parsons thought that when it came to the BDF the Crown Prince 'was ludicrously complacent,' convinced that it was trustworthy and that 'the maintenance of its loyalty was simply a matter of good man-management.'<sup>1050</sup>

After this meeting, the Foreign Office sent the Political Agency in Bahrain a note essentially outlining Britain's capitulation on the BDF issue. The Foreign Office admitted that there was very little chance of convincing the Ruler that the BDF was a danger, 'still less of getting him to switch his insurance to the State Police (minus Muhammad bin Salman),' the note read. This was because Shaikh Isa – and here the Foreign Office uses Parsons original phrase – 'still regards the [BDF] in his heart of hearts as a potential private army providing counter-weight to the State Police.'<sup>1051</sup> Stirling at the Political Agency did not support this analysis. The Ruler had never regarded the BDF as a counterweight to the State Police. 'If anything,' Stirling wrote back to the Foreign Office, 'the reverse would be nearer the truth.' The Ruler, Stirling replied,

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<sup>1049</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, Internal Foreign Office communication, A.D. Parsons to Mr. Allen, regarding BDF, response to above, 14 April 1971.

<sup>1050</sup> Ibid, A.D. Parsons (Foreign Office) to A.A. Acland (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain Defence Force,' 19 April 1971. Shaikh Hamad certainly felt confident enough in the Force's loyalty to attend US Staff College at Leavenworth, leaving the BDF without a Commander for the first six months following Britain's withdrawal.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid, A.J.D. Stirling (Political Agency, Bahrain) to A.A. Acland (Foreign Office), 'Bahrain Internal Security,' 27 April 1971.

[. . .] spoke of the BDF with dubiety in 1969; he took the February 1970 parade with gloomy resignation, wondering which of the NCOs would eventually hold the pistol to his head; he was alarmed by the February 1971 parade, when the Saladins, dipping their guns in salute, gave him a clear view up the barrels. He was shaken by the [1969] Libyan revolution and by the unveiling last year of the subversive cell in the BDF. He echoes my doom-laden remarks both back to me and to visitors and his regularly repeated line is that the BDF is being watched closely, that its strength is to be reduced to 500 and that re-enlistments beyond the first three-year engagement are not to be permitted. This may all be a front, but I believe that he actually does consider the BDF to be a menace and the police to be trustworthy.<sup>1052</sup>

Why, if Stirling's observations are correct, did the Ruler allow the BDF to continue? Stirling believed that the Ruler simply did 'not have the heart to take away Shaikh Hamad's toys.'<sup>1053</sup> Stirling thought he could best counter this 'pathetic indulgence' (i.e. the BDF) by continuing his 'steady two-year drip' against the force to the Ruler and the rest of the Bahrain government. 'Straight table-thumping,' Stirling reasoned, 'will not work, since it is likely to bounce off and could be counterproductive.' Describing his method as 'quiet erosion of the BDF,' Stirling admitted that progress had gone no further than halting its growth and cutting back its funds. Several key figures in the Bahraini government were purportedly alive to the BDF's dangers and appalled by its cost. Yet Shaikh Hamad put up a 'stout resistance' and, though he was denied his second battalion and additional armour, he managed to squeeze up the strength of the BDF nonetheless.<sup>1054</sup> Stirling said he would continue to work on the Ruler's fears in order,

[. . .] to get the armoured cars immobilised (these give the BDF a decisive edge over the police); to get the arms and ammunition held under strict security arrangements; and to get the ruler's plan of reduction by wastage put into effect.<sup>1055</sup>

Stirling hoped to take advantage of Shaikh Hamad's absence at Fort Leavenworth (US War College where Hamad would be attending a military course). Deprived of its one real champion, the Political Agent hoped that a

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<sup>1052</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1053</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1054</sup> Figures on the size of the Force have been removed until 2012. Ibid.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid.



policy of slowly eroding confidence in the BDF would gain traction.<sup>1056</sup> The Foreign Office accepted Stirling's line that Britain's aim should be to bring about the BDF's 'effective containment and neutralisation.'<sup>1057</sup> At the same time, Britain should give as much support as it could to the State Police, which was Bahrain's best means of resisting the potentially coup-making BDF.

Bahrain had seen the most active subversive activity in the Gulf in the years prior to Britain's departure. After 1967, the Bahrain National Liberation Front (NLF), a mostly Shia group, was considered by British intelligence to be the best organised subversive movement in the Gulf. The group was believed to have been responsible for a succession of attacks in early 1968 – car burnings, demonstrations, destruction of a power sub-station – which stretched the 1000-strong State Police and its British officers.<sup>1058</sup> The Special Branch, under the direction of Henderson, disrupted the group in the autumn of 1968 by arresting the suspected ringleaders.

Rising prosperity, the growing efficiency of the police and the absence of hostile Arab propaganda kept Bahrain tranquil in first half of 1971. Yet British officials did not rule out the potential for bomb outrages, kidnappings, assassinations and wider demonstrations in the future in Bahrain. Whilst subversive groups appeared to be split and ineffectual, Britain understood that disaffected elements in Bahraini society could be stirred into action with little provocation. Britain wanted to avoid its military forces, still stationed at Muharraq, becoming entangled in any internal action in Bahrain on the eve of withdrawal and did what it could to help build up the police whilst at the same time as working to undermine the BDF.

Up to 1971, Bahrain continued to look to Britain for training and equipment and was prepared to pay for it. Equipment for the police was mostly of British origin, including two *Scout* general-purpose light helicopters flown by two British contract pilots who were brothers.<sup>1059</sup> On the eve of Britain's

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<sup>1056</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1057</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639 D G. Allen (Foreign Office) to A.J.D. Stirling (Political Agency, Bahrain), 'Bahrain Internal Security,' 20 May 1971.

<sup>1058</sup> As of May 1968 the State Police consisted of 22 British officers, 39 Arab officers, 1020 NCOs and constables and an additional riot squad of 80 men. It was equipped with two helicopters, 12 armoured cars and had machine guns and a small number of mortars as part of its arsenal.

<sup>1059</sup> Scout helicopters were not really suitable and hideously expensive to maintain (though Shaikh Khalifah has instructed that they are to be made and kept airworthy).

withdrawal, the British commandant of the police, Mr Bell, was broadly satisfied with the force under his command. The policemen, he noted, were pretty poor material but they were doing as well as expected and perhaps better than this. Bell noted that he had the Bahraini government's backing for an expansion programme. A hundred recruits had been brought in as the first step in increasing the number of policemen to nearly 2,000 (the riot squad alone trebled from 40 to 120 men in just one year). In addition, Bahrain hired a separate British officer to deal full-time with airport security. The Foreign Office proposed in May 1971 three more police adviser posts for British officers in Bahrain. Such was the support for State Police and Special Branch that the Foreign Office offered to pay a proportion of these officers' salaries from its own global Counter-Subversion Fund.<sup>1060</sup> This was despite the fact that a policy of Bahrainisation – which included, but was not limited to, the police – had been under way 1969. (G. Smith, Secretary to the Government, and Dr R.H.B. Snow, the Director of Medical Services, both were retired early in 1970 as part of this Bahrainisation policy which affected most governmental departments.)<sup>1061</sup> The State Police promoted a large number of Bahraini and Arab officers, transferring them to the headquarters to fill posts left by retiring British officers.<sup>1062</sup> Yet Commandant Bell also had a policy, in the words of the Political Agent, 'of keeping white faces in the background' and of doing all he could 'to train efficient understudies for the British officers.' Stirling believed, however, that this was nearly impossible for a Special Branch that was dependent on its British personnel.<sup>1063</sup> The replacement of expatriates by Bahrainis would in practice mean 'the eclipse of the Branch.' At any rate, Bahrain Government considered Henderson irreplaceable.<sup>1064</sup> Indeed, Henderson remained head of the security services in Bahrain until the early 1990s.

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The American gyrocopters were ordered and were a much better bet. There was no comparable British machine.

<sup>1060</sup> TNA FCO 8/1639, D.G. Allen (Foreign Office) to A.J.D. Stirling (Political Agency, Bahrain), 'Bahrain Internal Security', 20 May 1971.

<sup>1061</sup> AWDU, 'Annual Report for year 1970,' Bahrain Government Annual Reports 1924-1970: Volume VII 1967-70.

<sup>1062</sup> Shaikh Muhammad bin Salman remained nominally Head of Public Security but his influence had become increasingly peripheral. TNA FCO 8/1639, Memorandum, by A.J.D. Stirling, 'Bahrain State Police,' 20 March 1971.

<sup>1063</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid, A.J.D. Stirling (Political Agency, Bahrain) to P.R.H. Wright (Bahrain Residency), 'Bahrain Internal Security,' 25 March 1971.

## 6.6 Indirect Assistance in Independent Kuwait: From Defence Guarantee to Arms Sales, 1968-71

Luce's recommendations for a residual security policy in the Gulf had, in a fashion, already been implemented and tested in Kuwait since the emirate elected for independence in 1961. The key difference being, of course, that Kuwait continued to enjoy the protection of a British defence guarantee, albeit one based on air power alone after 1966. Perhaps partly playing to the Arab nationalist gallery, Kuwait publicly gave Britain notice to on 13 May 1968 to terminate this defence agreement. Yet the Kuwaiti government was careful to stipulate that it would not take effect for three years.<sup>1065</sup> So although the Kuwaiti Prime Minister announced in July 1968 that Kuwait would neither need nor accept any foreign military presence, British or otherwise, in the country, the Kuwaiti government had invited a British Military Advisory Mission (MAM) to visit the emirate in May-June and examine its defence needs. Led by Major General E.N. Hall, the MAM advised Kuwait to improve the level of training in its military before buying more equipment.<sup>1066</sup>

Provided that Iraq did not achieve air superiority and Kuwaiti troops were not tied down in internal security functions, British defence officials assessed in October 1968 that 'the Kuwaiti Army should be able to delay an Iraqi force committed to an opportunistic attack.'<sup>1067</sup> They believed that Kuwait's military had made great strides since 1961 and accredited these improvements to the work of the Kuwait Liaison Team. The KLT also provided other commercial benefits for Britain. Writing to the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, in January 1969, British Ambassador Graham in Kuwait observed that the KLT,

[. . .] has continued to expand modestly and forms a valued and almost irreplaceable prop to the Kuwait Armed Forces. Apart from the fact that the Team's full expense are paid by the Kuwait Government, we have continued to reap from its existence a considerable harvest

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<sup>1065</sup> Kelly (1980), p. 172

<sup>1066</sup> TNA DEFE 24/572, J.A.N. Graham (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 19 June 1968.

<sup>1067</sup> TNA DEFE 13/850, Chiefs of Staff Committee, (COS 73/68) with Annex A, 'British Military Assistance to Kuwait,' and Appendix 1, 'The Threat and Capabilities of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti Forces,' circulated 22 October 1968. See also Mobley (2001), pp. 76-7.

to our balance of payments, new defence orders placed in Britain by Kuwait during 1968 amounting to some £10 million in value.<sup>1068</sup>

For the British defence chiefs in 1970, the Kuwait Armed Forces (KAF) was a crucial means to 'ensure the maintenance of conditions for the continued supply of Kuwaiti oil to the free world on reasonable terms, to the profit of a British oil company and the benefit of the United Kingdom's balance of payments.'<sup>1069</sup> For this reason, Britain wanted to assist as far as possible in building up the KAF's capabilities. At any rate, the Kuwait armed forces were judged to only be able to function by continuing to seek foreign – mostly British – assistance. In the eyes of British observers, the Kuwaiti armed forces would still be dependent on external help, especially foreign experts, for some time. 'Without foreign help [which included in addition to the KLT, Pakistani Air Force instructors and maintenance crews],' the new ambassador, Sam Falle, wrote to the British Foreign Secretary in April 1970, 'they could fight a battle with motorised infantry; but their Air Force would quickly be grounded and their tanks would soon grind to a halt.'<sup>1070</sup> General Mubarak (Chief of Staff of the KAF) was especially worried about the expiry on 13 May 1971 of Britain's defence guarantee. He told Lt. Colonel Sanders (the officer commanding KLT) that after May 1971 'the food on the table will no longer be screened from the flies and he will need a new cloth [i.e. to keep out the flies].'<sup>1071</sup> The British wanted this 'new cloth' to be a capable Kuwaiti military that looked to Britain for its weapons.

As British military plans to defend Kuwait were dependent on the deployment of the Kuwait Army in significant strength, it was, according to the British ambassador, in Britain's interests to 'support the Kuwait Government in military matters with discreet advice and any other help which our forces and factories can provide.'<sup>1072</sup> Militaries in the Arab world had, however, shown a propensity for seizing political power. Did Britain not then fear that expanding

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<sup>1068</sup> TNA FCO 8/1031, J. Graham (British Embassy, Kuwait) to the Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'Annual Review of Events in Kuwait for 1968,' 4 January 1969.

<sup>1069</sup> TNA DEFE 13/850, Chief of Defence Staff to Denis Healey (Defence Secretary), 'British Military Assistance to Kuwait,' 13 February 1970.

<sup>1070</sup> TNA FCO 8/1406, S. Falle (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'The Military and Security Forces in Kuwait,' 5 April 1970.

<sup>1071</sup> TNA FCO 8/1402, D.F. Murray (British Embassy, Kuwait) to A.A. Acland (Foreign Office), 'The Defence of Kuwait,' 7 October 1970.

<sup>1072</sup> TNA DEFE 24/572, J. Graham (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 19 June 1968.

the Kuwaiti armed forces could expose the political leadership to similar internal threats?<sup>1073</sup> It was thought, after all, that the 1969 coup d'état in Libya presented temptations to potential revolutionaries as there were amongst the officers in Kuwait.<sup>1074</sup> According to Ambassador Graham, the Kuwait Armed Forces were the exception in the Middle East in that they take no part in politics. 'Their whole organisation is designed to secure their loyalty to and support for the existing regime,' he told the British Foreign Secretary in June 1968.<sup>1075</sup> Getting this judgement right was important as British planning for the defence of Kuwait depended on the armed forces remaining loyal.<sup>1076</sup> The Kuwaiti Secret Security Service (KSSS) was established in the late 1960s to keep an eye on potential opponents within and without the military. Moreover, British officials were confident that the presence of Bedouin personnel, who were without revolutionary inclinations, was the best insurance policy. 'The Bedu who are by tradition patriarchal, are conservatives and great snobs', Ambassador Falle explained to the British Foreign Secretary. 'They despise the born Kuwait citizens (the Ruling Family excepted) as spineless and worthless parvenus, while the Kuwaitis regard the Bedu as uncouth and frightening barbarians.'<sup>1077</sup>

As Britain's exit from the region approached, the new Ambassador, A.J. Wilton, voiced his fears about Kuwait's future. If Iran moved to annex the islands of Abu Musa and the Two Tunbs and Saudi Arabia took the territory in dispute with Abu Dhabi, then Iraq might make a bid for Kuwait. 'If grabs become the order of the day, Kuwait is certainly wide open,' Wilton warned. Without British air cover, the Kuwaiti military would not be able to resist such a move.

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<sup>1073</sup> Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1970); S.N. Fisher, *The Military in the Middle East: Problems in Society and Government* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1963); George Haddad, *Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East*, vols. 1-3 (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1965-1973); J.C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1969); Riad N. El-Rayyes and Dunia Nahas (eds.) *Politics in Uniform: A Study of the Military in the Arab World and Israel* (An-Nahar Press Series, 1972); Dankwart Rustow, *The Military in Middle Eastern Politics and Society* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1963).

<sup>1074</sup> TNA FCO 8/1406, S. Falle (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'The Military and Security Forces in Kuwait,' 5 April 1970.

<sup>1075</sup> TNA DEFE 24/572, J. Graham (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 19 June 1968.

<sup>1076</sup> TNA FCO 8/1406, S. Falle (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael Stewart (Foreign Secretary), 'The Military and Security Forces in Kuwait,' 5 April 1970.

<sup>1077</sup> Ibid.

Unlike his predecessor, Wilson thought the Kuwait military could pose a future threat to the Al-Sabah:

[. . .] it can only be a question of time before some young officers who are now passing through the Military College in substantial numbers feel that their own superior attainments are insufficiently recognised and that old-fashioned incompetence should make way for modernity, progress and similar undefined and fashionable concepts.<sup>1078</sup>

Major General Mubarak was less worried about the loyalty of men and more about the future naval threat from Iran in light of Britain's impending departure. He renewed his interest in a Kuwaiti navy. The first time Kuwait considered establishing a naval force in 1966, it brought in a retired Royal Navy Commander, Peton-Jones, who was a specialist in setting up the navies of newly independent countries. Peton-Jones recommended a force of six patrol boats with accompanying manpower of 30 officers, 190 men and 10 civilians, together with six ex-Royal Navy officers and six ex-Royal Navy petty officers. Britain provided a quote from the British manufacturer Thorneycroft for patrol boats which appalled the Kuwaitis.<sup>1079</sup> Aside from the cost of the boats, Major General Mubarak thought the manpower challenges were formidable. If a navy had been started in 1950, Mubarak thought, it may have been possible to get recruits from the old sea-faring families. But now these families were rich and their sons would not want to join the navy. You could not take Bedu from the middle of the desert and put him on a ship, Mubarak told the British Ambassador in 1968. If he did set up a navy, Kuwait would need British officers and recruits from the lower Gulf.<sup>1080</sup> Though the ambassador thought it would be wiser for Kuwait to focus on its air force and not put to sea at all, he did not

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<sup>1078</sup> TNA FCO 8/1655, A.J. Wilton (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Foreign Secretary, 14 March 1971.

<sup>1079</sup> TNA FO 371/185422, Translation of a letter from Saad al-Abdullah al-Salim (Kuwaiti Minister of Defence) to British Ambassador, 18 January 1966; TNA FO 371/185422, Martin S. Berthoud (Foreign Office) to C.C.R Battiscombe (British Embassy, Kuwait), 11 February 1966; and TNA FO 371/185422, J. Graham (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to M.S. Weir (Foreign Office), 19 July 1966.

<sup>1080</sup> TNA FCO 8/675, G.G. Arthur (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Michael S. Weir (Foreign Office), 24 March 1968. Repeating conversation he had with General Mubarak.

press his views to the Kuwaiti authorities. 'The important thing is that if the Kuwaitis do start a navy, they should buy British boats.'<sup>1081</sup>

Towards the end of the decade, Britain began to place greater store by the commercial benefits of its military assistance to Kuwait. When Kuwait turned to Britain for more combat aircraft after the May 1967 border incident with Iraq, the Foreign Office felt that the British government should do all it could to help provide aircraft. This was firstly because the 'air alone' concept put 'much stress on the effectiveness of Kuwait's own forces in an emergency.' But Foreign Office Minister, George Thomson revealed that there was also a second motivation at play. 'Kuwait is a lucrative market for British arms and aircraft sales; the less she has to turn to others the better,' he noted to the Ministry of Defence.<sup>1082</sup> Arms sales to Kuwait began to take a paramount place in British defence interests in the emirate as withdrawal approached. Whilst the Americans regarded Kuwait as being essentially British territory as far as arms sales were concerned, and did not wish 'to come in to queer our pitch,'<sup>1083</sup> the French began showing an interest in selling equipment.<sup>1084</sup> Major General Mubarak and Brigadier Saleh, the Deputy Chief of General Staff, stressed to Mike Sanders (the officer commanding the KLT) their 'strong wish to stay British in the arms purchase plans for the future.' Mubarak expressed his hope that Britain would continue to give Kuwait support in military matters after 1971.<sup>1085</sup> After British withdrawal from the Gulf, Britain continued to help Kuwait modernise its armed forces through the KLT.<sup>1086</sup>

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<sup>1081</sup> TNA FCO 8/675, G.G. Arthur (British Ambassador, Kuwait) to Michael S. Weir (Foreign Office), 24 March 1968.

<sup>1082</sup> TNA FCO 8/661, George Thomson (Foreign Secretary) to Roy Mason (Defence Secretary), 1 June 1967.

<sup>1083</sup> TNA FCO 8/1404, A.C. Goodison (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Lt. Col. William Adler (Foreign Office), 25 November 1970.

<sup>1084</sup> Ibid, A.C. Goodison (British Embassy, Kuwait) to C.B. Benjamin (Ministry of Aviation), 'Jaguars for Kuwait,' 16 November 1970

<sup>1085</sup> Ibid, A.C. Goodison (British Embassy, Kuwait) to Lt. Col. William Adler (Foreign Office), 25 November 1970.

<sup>1086</sup> In the month before withdrawal, the KLT comprised of seven Army officers and 51 men and 14 RAF officers and 78 airmen. Refer to TNA DEFE 5/191, Annex A to COS Committee (91)71, 'Directive to the Officer Commanding Kuwait Liaison Team,' 29 November 1971.

## 6.7 Deepening British Commitment in Oman, 1970-71: Training Irregulars and Assisting the SAF

Britain's announced its decision to relinquish its formal military role 'east of Suez' at a time when the insurgency in Oman was worsening. The establishment of a Marxist-Leninist regime in the newly unified independent People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1967 led to greater direct support to the rebels. Sultan Said was losing the backing of his own people and, perhaps just as important, the backing of the British. He was criticised by both groups for his parsimony and his myopic view of the role of government.<sup>1087</sup> The Consul-General, however, thought the Sultan was beginning to take concrete steps to improve his military and might be able to turn the tide against the rebels. He increased pay in the SAF, making it easier to recruit Omanis and good British contract officers, which reduced his dependency on secondments.<sup>1088</sup> In early 1968 the Sultan did authorise the purchase of several transport aircraft, but this was largely to compensate for the decrease in RAF flights between Muscat and Salalah that resulted from the drawdown of Britain's military presence in the Arabian Peninsula, especially the reduction in frequency of RAF transport flights. Though heartened by these incremental improvements, the rebels were using the cover of the monsoon to infiltrate from PDRY in greater and greater numbers.

Nearly all British officials were gloomy about the situation in Muscat and Oman. A rebel success in Dhofar would have severe consequences for the rest of the Sultanate. Indeed, the rebels believed that once the backdoor to Oman was breached, the rest of the Gulf would be open. Reflecting this wider strategy, the Dhofar Liberation Front had changed its name in 1968 to the Peoples' Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). In August 1969, the rebels captured the coastal town of Raikhut in Dhofar, detaining and killing the Sultan's *askars*. In the Dhofar stakes, the new Consul-General in November

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<sup>1087</sup> Sir Gawain Bell, *An Imperial Twilight* (London: Lester Crook, 1989), p. 172. Bell was sent to Oman by the Foreign Office in February 1966 with the task of making recommendations for improving the Sultan's system of government in light of oil revenues.

<sup>1088</sup> TNA FCO 8/567, D.C. Carden (Consul-General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 'Sultanate Balance Sheet', 4 April 1968.



1969 said his money was on the rebels.<sup>1089</sup> In spite of these setbacks, the British Commander of the SAF was unwilling to commit more troops from central Oman. He feared exposing the oil facilities to an outbreak of subversion in the interior. Money from oil – Sultanate oil revenues were £40 million in 1969 – provided the Sultan with the means to purchase more helicopters and combat aircraft without a British subsidy. Largely free from British financial assistance, the Sultan could choose to ignore Britain’s advice. He did not feel the need to give in to British pressure in 1969 to establish a fourth battalion to pinch off the enemy’s supply routes in the west. ‘Mustering another battalion is a possibility,’ the Consul-General, D.G. Crawford, wrote,

[. . .] but that depends on the Sultan and he is yet to match his “Churchillian” tones with “Churchillian” deeds. Extra soldiers cost extra money – a lot of money to a “babu” mind – and there are not that many able-bodied Omanis and Baluchis around keen enough to go to Dhofar.<sup>1090</sup>

Moreover, he paid no heed to Britain’s calls for him to adopt a hearts and minds strategy. The Sultan, according to Crawford, ‘refused to accept any idea that the war could not be won by military means alone,’ preferring to ‘starve the people of the Dhofari hill and jungle areas (Jebelis) rather than attempt to deal with the root causes of their rebellion.’<sup>1091</sup> British officials believed that by refusing to raise more ground forces and adopt a different counterinsurgency strategy the Sultan had written himself a prescription for ultimate defeat. They could do little to persuade the Sultan to change course. The situation deteriorated throughout 1969-70, as the government forces, outgunned by the better armed *adoo*, effectively surrendered the jebel to the PFLOAG.<sup>1092</sup>

The key factor in safeguarding British interests in the wider Gulf was thus the ability of the SAF to remain a credible force for the preservation of law and

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<sup>1089</sup> TNA FCO 8/1072, D. Crawford (Consul-General, Muscat) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), ‘Current Situation in Dhofar,’ 1 November 1969.

<sup>1090</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1091</sup> TNA FO 1016/791, D. Crawford (Consulate General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), ‘Annual Review for 1969,’ 30 December 1969. TNA WO 321/21131, Lt. Col. William Adler (Foreign Office) to D.A.J. West (Ministry of Defence), ‘Muscat and Oman: The Sultan’s Armed Forces,’ 22 December 1969.

<sup>1092</sup> Hughes (2009), p. 280; Ranulph Fiennes, *Where Soldiers Fear to Tread* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1975), pp. 103-5; and Thwaites and Sloan (1995), pp. 70-1.

order in the Sultanate.<sup>1093</sup> British officials were angered that because of the Sultan's parsimony the SAF consisted of only 3,000 men and were equipped with antiquated weapons. The Consul-General, for example, thought it was difficult to conceive that anywhere else a military force of SAF's size and make-up would go into action in a theatre like Dhofar without a military hospital. (The RAF flew SAF casualties to the hospital in Bahrain.)<sup>1094</sup> To make matters worse, a separate guerrilla front opened up in northern Oman where the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (NDFLOAG) began attacking the SAF and its bases.<sup>1095</sup>

The British government moved closer and closer to the conclusion that the price for using the facilities at Masriah – defending the Salalah airbase in Dhofar – outweighed any benefits. In short, the game was no longer worth the candle.<sup>1096</sup> Multiple rebel mortar attacks on RAF Salalah in 1970 gave Britain even greater cause to reconsider its policy towards Muscat and Oman. The upshot of this re-evaluation was that its involvement in the SAF would have to continue if its oil interests in central Oman were to be protected. British support to the force was still the critical factor in its effectiveness. British military planners were fully behind plans of the Sultan's new privately employed British Defence Secretary, Hugh Oldman, to increase the size of the SAF by a fourth battalion,<sup>1097</sup> even though this meant that Britain would have to raise the ceiling placed on the number of seconded officers it provided from 38 to 55 officers, which they were hard-pressed to provide.<sup>1098</sup>

Whilst they supported the plan for the strengthened SAF to dominate the western sector of Dhofar near the border, British officials were clear in their own minds that 'military operations no matter how successful will not achieve their

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<sup>1093</sup> TNA FO 1016/791, D. Crawford (Consulate-General, Muscat) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 'Annual Review for 1969,' 30 December 1969.

<sup>1094</sup> TNA FCO 8/1072, D. Crawford (Consul-General, Muscat) to M.S. Weir (Bahrain Residency), 'Current Situation in Dhofar,' 1 November 1969.

<sup>1095</sup> Kelly (1980), pp. 136-9.

<sup>1096</sup> TNA FCO 8/1072, D.J. McCarthy (Foreign Office) to Stewart Crawford (Political Resident), 6 November 1969.

<sup>1097</sup> Oldman was the former CSAF between March 1961 and March 1964. He also had been a serving British officer in the Sudan Defence Force (1950) and the APLs (1957-60). He replaced Pat Waterfield in February 1970.

<sup>1098</sup> Before Jebel Regiment: 38 Seconded British officers, 50+ Contract British officers, 40 Arab/Pakistani officers 7 British NCOs, 90 Pakistani NCOs. Excluding SOAF and Oman Gendarmerie , 2,500 men.

aim without corresponding political progress.<sup>1099</sup> The British Government and its representatives in the Gulf encouraged the Sultan to begin a civil development project to win over his Dhofari subjects. Britain would even countenance deploying British troops if they could see evidence that Sultan was prepared to take significant measures to improve the situation in Dhofar both militarily and in the field of civilian development.

Dismayed at the lack of progress in Oman, Britain helped the Sultan's son (Qaboos) seize power in a near-bloodless palace coup in July 1970. The details remain somewhat unclear, but it is beyond doubt that British officers in Oman, the Foreign Office and its Gulf representatives were complicit in the plan to replace Sultan Said with his Sandhurst-educated son, Qaboos bin Said.<sup>1100</sup> Indeed, British defence chiefs back in London concluded a week before the event that it was in Britain's interests 'that a successful coup d'état take place.'<sup>1101</sup> Two British officers and Shaikh Braik bin Hamud led a group of six Omani soldiers into the Sultan's palace at Salalah. After a brief exchange of gunfire, the Sultan agreed to abdicate, living out his final days in London's Dorchester Hotel.

Historians have been quick to seize upon Qaboos' coming to a power as a turning point in the Dhofar campaign and in Oman's fortunes more generally.<sup>1102</sup> Less attention has been placed on the change in the level of support Britain gave to the Omani military at this time. Soon after the coup, Britain ramped up its support to the Sultan's forces. In August 1970 Brigadier Roderick Semple, Director of the Special Air Service (SAS), led a British military team to Oman to explore the possibility of using special forces to train the SAF and irregular forces.<sup>1103</sup> Semple believed that a 40-strong training team would give the SAS considerable experience in the role of raising and training indigenous forces. The proposal had the backing of the Foreign Secretary Douglas-Home, as well as the Prime Minister Edward Heath, who wrote, by way of reply to the

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<sup>1099</sup> TNA WO 321/21131, Chief of Staff Committee, Defence Operational Planning Staff, 'The Situation in Muscat and Oman,' 30 July 1970.

<sup>1100</sup> Though Hugh Oldman was a contract officer he was in constant contact with the Ministry of Defence.

<sup>1101</sup> TNA FCO 46/609, Ministry of Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Confidential Annex to COS 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting/70, 15 July 1970.

<sup>1102</sup> Peterson (2007), p. 183.

<sup>1103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 479.

proposal, that 'I strongly support – and the Sultan has plenty of money to pay us for all this.'<sup>1104</sup> The plan to train bands (sing. *firqa* in Arabic, but usually pronounced as *firqat* on account of the *ta marbuta* at the end of the word) of tribesmen marked a step change in British involvement.

The rebellion dragged on into 1971. Before the monsoon broke, the rebels took a firmer grip on the areas under their control. Slow delivery of helicopters and aircraft made full-scale operations against the rebellion impossible before monsoon. Afterwards the SAF, with the SAS-trained bands of irregulars, launched a series of operations against the rebels to interrupt supplies of food and ammunition. Each *firqa* force was drawn from a common tribe and usually put twenty or thirty men in the field at a time. They were trained by the SAS Squadron on rotation in Dhofar known as the BATT (British Army Training Team).<sup>1105</sup>

In the months before its withdrawal from the Gulf, Britain wrestled with whether or not it should give more or less support to the Sultan in military matters. The Political Resident authored the following argument to the Douglas-Home in April 1971:

We want our facilities on Masirah; we are under obligation to second officers to the Sultan's Armed Forces; we cannot afford to see the Sultan lose. We should therefore not shrink, particularly during the rest of 1971, from providing the fullest possible aid, short of overt involvement by British force, to the effort to win the war in Dhofar.<sup>1106</sup>

Britain hoped that by training and directing the indigenous irregular *firqats* that it could assist Oman in making progress against the rebels without direct military intervention with its own forces. Though difficult to motivate, the *firqats* were starting to show signs of performing well. The Sultan's Defence Secretary, Hugh Oldman, was one convert:

The Firqat operating in the overall operational and logistical framework provided by the SAF must be the most important and hopeful factor in defeating the hard-core communists. Only by

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<sup>1104</sup> TNA DEFE 25/186, C.W. Roberts (Prime Minister's office) to J.Graham (Foreign Office), 7 September 1970.

<sup>1105</sup> Bryan Ray, *Dangerous Frontiers: Campaigning in Somaliland & Oman* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2008), p. 64.

<sup>1106</sup> TNA FCO 8/1680, G.G. Arthur (Political Resident) to Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary), 'What about Oman?', 26 April 1971.

support of the non-communist element among the *Jebalis* [mountain folk] can progress be made. Only *success* by the *Firqat* supported, organised and controlled by SAF through the SAS can a true counter-revolution against Communism be created.<sup>1107</sup>

On the 4 August, the British Cabinet approved the proposal for a second squadron of SAS to expand the number of *firqats*. Though difficult to train, and sometimes volatile to command, the *firqats* played an important part in the 'clear and hold' strategy the SAF conducted from 1971 onwards to recapture the *jebel*.<sup>1108</sup> In October 1971, the SAS-led *firqat* force established a permanent base on the *jebel* at Jibjat.

The provision of special operations forces to train irregular fighters was not the only British military support: Britain had mortar teams and fire control elements directing artillery barrages on the Salalah Plain.<sup>1109</sup> Furthermore, like his father before him, Qaboos relied heavily on his British Defence Secretary, Hugh Oldman, and on the 200-odd British officers serving in his forces.<sup>1110</sup> The Political Resident explained to Douglas Home the closeness of the relationship between Sultan Qaboos and the Britons working in the Sultanate:

[Sultan Qaboos] rose to power on the backs of his army, and he does not forget this. His army means his British officers and British Defence Secretary, and these are the people he really trusts, together with his British bank manager and some of the senior staff of the oil company.<sup>1111</sup>

Through building up the *firqats* and supporting the SAF, Britain hoped that most of the rebel areas would be pacified by mid-1972 and that British forces could be withdrawn. The first phase (Operation *Jaguar*), lasting from October to December, was to drive the rebels from the eastern region (east of Salalah); then to attack enemy supply routes in the central region (roughly the hinterland

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<sup>1107</sup> TNA FCO 8/1668, Col. Hugh Oldman (Defence Secretary, Sultanate of Oman), 'The Dhofar Rebellion,' August 1971.

<sup>1108</sup> Gen. Sir Peter de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 267-8; and Hughes (2009), p. 283.

<sup>1109</sup> Farrukh Dhandy, 'Britain's Gulf War', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.7 (Jul., 1972), pp. 1351-1352; Anthony McDermott and Peter Harvey, 'UK Troops Fighting Rebels in Oman', *MERIP Reports*, No.7 (Feb., 1972).

<sup>1110</sup> TNA FCO 8/1848, Donald Hawley (British Ambassador, Muscat) to Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary), 'Oman: Annual Review for 1971,' 3 January 1972.

<sup>1111</sup> TNA FCO 8/1680, G.G. Arthur (Political Resident) to Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary), 'What About Oman?', 26 April 1971.

around Salalah); and to finally harass their training areas near the border with PDRY to the west. Yet the PFLOAG remained on the offensive, establishing full control over the road between Salalah and the military base of Thumrait to the north. The commander of British military in the Gulf reported back to London in March 1971 that:

This war has reached a most interesting stage. The recent improvements in the capabilities of the Sultan's forces (e.g. a fourth infantry battalion, concentrated training during the Autumn and Winter, light helicopter and increased air transport support) have been matched by better leadership, tactics and weapons by the enemy.<sup>1112</sup>

On 1 October 1971, 350 men from the SAF forces and five of the SAS-trained *firqats* began Operation *Jaguar*. The Sultan's forces seized a number of towns in eastern Dhofar and set up a defensive line (code-named *Leopard*) to cut off enemy resupply. The British Chief of the General Staff, Michael Carver, offered his assessment to the Chief of Defence Staff after visiting Oman in October. 'There is now good reason to hope,' he wrote, 'that the present campaign may achieve its aim before the next monsoon in mid-summer 1972.'<sup>1113</sup> In this context, British military planners in the Gulf vociferously fought back against attempts to end the SAS role. Major-General Roland Gibbs argued that: 'A withdrawal of BATT will lead to a rapid loss of effectiveness by the *Firqats* and probably their disintegration as a fighting force.' He went on to conclude that it was 'not only essential to SAF plans that the present level of British participation continues to the end of March 72, but that it will be very difficult for SAF if this support is withdrawn before the middle of June 1972'.<sup>1114</sup> Even after the last fighting units left Bahrain and Sharjah, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) recommended to the British Defence Secretary that two squadrons of SAS remain in Dhofar until March 1972. Moreover, after this date, he advised that one squadron should remain along with the artillery and mortar troops on

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<sup>1112</sup> TNA DEFE 11/687, Maj. Gen. Roland Gibbs (Commander British Forces Gulf (CBFG)) to Chiefs of Defence Staff (CDS), 'Newsletter No. 3,' 29 March 1971.

<sup>1113</sup> TNA DEFE 25/187 Chief of General Staff (CGS) to CDS, 'Visit to Cyprus and Salalah', 26 October 1971. He reached this conclusion largely because of briefings he received from the CSAF and from discussion with CBFG and the Ambassador, Hawley.

<sup>1114</sup> TNA DEFE 24/575, Maj. Gen. Roland Gibbs (CBFG) to Chiefs of Defence Staff, 'Report by CBFG on the War in Dhofar,' 16 November 1971.

Salalah Plain until at least the beginning of the monsoon (i.e. June 1972). The CDS backed up his recommendation with the follow remark:

If the maximum possible progress is to be made, the contribution of the SAS remains essential. The essence of the plan is the absolute necessity of carrying out successful operations in the Western Dhofar, near the PDRY border, before the monsoon breaks. Unless these operations are completed the enemy will be able to reinforce and resupply their forces in Central and Eastern Jebel during the monsoon, which could lead to an almost indefinite continuation of the campaign.<sup>1115</sup>

Intelligence reports at the end of 1971 noted that enemy morale was low and that the local population was more convinced of the SAF's ability to remain on the *jebel* and protect them from rebel reprisals.<sup>1116</sup>

The Dhofar insurgency rumbled on until the mid-1970s. Britain remained heavily involved in supporting Sultan, especially by continuing to provide seconded military personnel to Oman. All three Omani armed services were reliant on the provision of British loaned personnel and the 200 contracted Britons.<sup>1117</sup> Oman depended on this British contingent for military effectiveness during the war.<sup>1118</sup> Indeed, loan service officers and soldiers continued occupy key positions in Oman's military for decades after the insurgency ended. Much has been made of the role of the SAS in Oman, but British support to the Sultan's land forces and from air support was more critical.<sup>1119</sup>

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<sup>1115</sup> TNA DEFE 25/187, CDS to Peter Carrington (Defence Secretary), 'Situation in Dhofar', 15 December 1971.

<sup>1116</sup> TNA DEFE 25/187, SAF HQ Situation Report, 'Dhofar,' 6 November 1971; TNA DEFE 25/187, Hawley, 'Oman Intelligence Report No. 2,' 18 November 1971

<sup>1117</sup> Hughes (2009), p. 282.

<sup>1118</sup> John Akehurst, *We Won a War. The Campaign in Oman, 1965-1975* (Salisbury, UK: Michael Russell, 1982), pp. 31-45.

<sup>1119</sup> John Newswinger has criticized the inflated role of the SAS in Oman in *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture* (London: Pluto, 1997), pp. 18-21.

## EPILOGUE: THE BRITISH RESIDUAL ROLE AFTER 1971

In the summer of 1968, the Cabinet of Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, formed a sub-committee to avoid tackling the challenges of withdrawal in an ‘*ad hoc* and piecemeal’ fashion.<sup>1120</sup> The sub-committee proposed a programme of financial assistance to the Gulf states to help prepare them for independence.<sup>1121</sup> As part of the subcommittee’s agenda, the Foreign Secretary presented a paper in July 1968 on non-military methods of preserving British influence east of Suez after 1971, which one cabinet member described in his memoirs as ‘utterly futile’.<sup>1122</sup> Sir William Luce’s 1970 recommendations on the measures that Britain could take to remain engaged in security affairs after withdrawal met a more receptive audience. The thrust of British security role after 1971 would be training assistance, equipment sales, after sales services and advisory support to friends. The Defence Secretary at the time, Lord (Peter) Carrington, recalls in his memoirs that this proposed residual role ‘might be less exciting than the ability to launch expeditions beyond palm and pine but it could be self-financing; and it didn’t require carrier-borne air support!’<sup>1123</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the United States was encouraging Britain to maintain as much of their special role in the Gulf as they could.<sup>1124</sup> The American reaction to the decision to withdrawal, according to the British Ambassador in Washington, was

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<sup>1120</sup> TNA CAB 165/813, P.H. Gore-Booth (Foreign Office) to Burke Trend (Cabinet Secretary), ‘The Problems of the Persian Gulf,’ 18 July 1968. Trend agreed with the suggestion. A similar committee was formed for Aden. It was to be chaired by a Cabinet Office official Sir Robin Hooper.

<sup>1121</sup> TNA CAB 165/813, Defence and Overseas Policy (Official) Committee, Defence Review Working Party, minutes of meeting on: ‘Non Military means of influence in the Persian Gulf, South East Asia and Australia.’ 7 August 1968. As the chairman of the Defence and Overseas Policy (Official) Committee, E. M. Rose, noted in late July: It was the position of Ministers that before they ‘could consider approving any increase in non-military effort overseas, to compensate for our military withdrawal, they must have before them details of possible projects and their cost effectiveness.’

<sup>1122</sup> TNA CAB 165/813, Defence and Overseas Policy (Official) Committee, Defence Review Working Party, minutes of meeting on: ‘Non Military means of influence in the Persian Gulf, South East Asia and Australia.’ 7 August 1968. Richard Crossman, *Diaries* Vol. 3 (London, 1977) p. 159. See diary entry for 26 July 1968.

<sup>1123</sup> Carrington (1988), pp. 217-9.

<sup>1124</sup> Simon C. Smith, ‘Power Transferred? Britain, the United States, and the Gulf, 1956-71,’ *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2007), pp. 1-23.



[. . .] one of astonishment that we should contemplate withdrawing from an area where our economic stake (and incidentally their own), was so large, our political relations with the rulers apparently peaceful and the military costs so relatively modest.<sup>1125</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that British attempts to maintain influence in the Gulf after 1971 had American blessing; Washington saw a clear advantage in Britain's continued involvement in the area.<sup>1126</sup> Douglas-Home set out to convince his US counterpart, Secretary of State William Rogers, that Britain would establish an indirect presence in the area beyond 1971 in order to 'exercise the maximum political influence with the minimum British presence.'<sup>1127</sup>

Did Luce's recommendations – concretised into official government policy by the Cabinet's approval – manifest into action? A number of scholars have observed that Britain's engagement with the region did not evaporate with the dismantling of its military architecture at the end of 1971. Historian James Onley observes that:

the word "handover" is slightly misleading, for hundreds of Britons remained behind, as officers and civil servants seconded to, or in the private employ of, the Gulf governments, running the police, airports, hospitals, and newly formed militaries.<sup>1128</sup>

Publishing a survey of the post-independence Gulf shaikhdoms in 1975, John Duke Anthony made the observation that, in the fledgling UAE, the British withdrawal was more illusory than real. British nationals dominated the commercial life and banking sector while Britons ran the armed forces.<sup>1129</sup> Uzi Rabi, another scholar who has written extensively on the Gulf, contends that:

The ruling families of the Gulf states retained extensive links with their onetime protector, both practical and personal. Britons continued to play a role in the process of state building among the

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<sup>1125</sup> TNA 25/265, Sir Patrick Dean (British Ambassador, U.S.) to George Brown (Foreign Secretary), 'United States Reactions to our Withdrawal east of Suez', 4 March 1968.

<sup>1126</sup> Macris (2010) p. 197 and p. 219

<sup>1127</sup> Tore T. Peterson, 'Book Review: Simon C. Smith, Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950-71 (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004),' *International History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2005), p. 438.

<sup>1128</sup> Onley (2009), pp. 23-4.

<sup>1129</sup> Anthony (1975) p. 228.

newly independent states of the Gulf, especially the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. The Gulf states have become liberal patrons of British universities and medical institutions. In short, the practical content of the interchange between Britain and the Gulf in all fields exceeds everything that could have been predicted by previous generations.<sup>1130</sup>

James H. Noyes, a US Department of Defense official who worked in the Gulf in the 1970s, wrote in 1979 that, after withdrawal, ‘the British made careful efforts to assure at least temporary continuity of the intelligence and counter subversion units that had been developed over many years under their special treaty relationships. British-led special branch units,’ he writes, ‘were left functioning in Bahrain, Qatar, and in the Shaikhdoms.’<sup>1131</sup>

British engagement in security, it seems, was not simply a tap that could be turned off. Robert W. Winks makes the useful point that for historians studying decolonisation and informal empire: ‘the process must seem even less clearly defined than in the case of evolutionary independence from a formal condition of ‘tutelage.’<sup>1132</sup> Winks argument is apposite when applied to the British exit in the Gulf, for Britain’s interests did not disappear when the last Royal Navy vessel weighed anchor in Bahrain, and Britain remained engaged in security affairs to protect these economic and strategic interests after its official role ended.<sup>1133</sup> Little more than six months after the British pull-out, officials at the Foreign Office felt sufficiently confident in Britain’s continued relevance in the Gulf that it informed the US State Department that, ‘instead of the low profile usually adopted by Britain in such post-independence or post-colonial situations,’ British influence throughout the Gulf remained ‘strong and visible’.<sup>1134</sup> The US State Department concurred, judging that Britain had

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<sup>1130</sup> Rabi (2006), pp. 361-362.

<sup>1131</sup> James H. Noyes, *The Clouded Lens: Persian Gulf Security and US Policy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979) p. 26. As the former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the region between 1970 and 1976, and one of the lead attendees of the bi-annual US/UK Persian Gulf Working Group, Noyes was well-placed to make these observations. The full title of James Noyes’ appointment was Deputy Assistant Security of Defense for Near Eastern, African and South Asian Affairs. The geographical scope of this position included the Persian Gulf.

<sup>1132</sup> Robin W. Winks, ‘On Decolonization and Informal Empire,’ *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (1976) pp. 541-542.

<sup>1133</sup> Fain (2008), p. 207

<sup>1134</sup> The National Archives, Kew, UK (hereafter TNA) FCO 8 1806, Anthony Parsons, ‘Record of Anglo/United States Talks on the Persian Gulf and Arabian peninsula held at the State Department on the 26 June 1972’ undated.

managed its withdrawal in such a way as to afford a continuing British role in support of the security of the region and that this was providing an important adjunct to its wider policy of building up Iran and Saudi Arabia as the tandem guardians of the Gulf.<sup>1135</sup>

Although the Gulf rulers had their offers to financially underwrite a continued British military presence turned down in 1968, they still looked to Britain in the first instance for security-related assistance. Britain's ability to remain influential after 1971, Jeffrey Macris has observed, rested to a large degree on the rulers' dependence upon Britons to fulfil critical positions related to defence matters.<sup>1136</sup> This supports the argument made by Marshall R. Singer back in 1972 that after independence most former protégés choose their erstwhile metropolises as the source of their security assistance.<sup>1137</sup> This is certainly what the British Ambassador in Qatar, Edward Henderson, believed. He wrote in a valedictory communique to the Foreign Secretary in 1974 after five years in Qatar that:

At a personal level at all points in the Government and in the business community I think we have even better relations after independence than we had before. The Qataris welcome British experts and engineers in positions in the Government and armed forces and seem to want more of them.<sup>1138</sup>

Whilst a number of commentators have recognised that British influence had a lifespan outlasting its protective role in Eastern Arabia, only a few attempts have

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<sup>1135</sup> For literature on the formation of American security policy in the Gulf refer to Gary Sick, 'The Evolution of US Strategy Toward the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf Regions', in Alvin Z. Rubinstein, ed., *The Great Game: Rivalry in the Persian Gulf and South Asia* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Simon C. Smith, 'Power Transferred? Britain, the United States, and the Gulf, 1956-71,' *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2007), pp. 14-15; James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); F. Gregory Gause, 'British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1973', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Oct. 1985) pp. 247-273; and Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York, The Free Press, 1992). On the perceptions surrounding Soviet naval encroachment in the region, see: Anthony Harrigan, 'Security Interests in the Persian Gulf and Western Indian Ocean', in Patrick Wall (ed.), *The Indian Ocean and the Threat to the West* (London: Stacey International, 1975), pp. 19-38.

<sup>1136</sup> Macris (2010), p. 197

<sup>1137</sup> Marshall R. Singer, *Weak States in a World of Powers: The Dynamics of International Relationships* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 282-84.

<sup>1138</sup> TNA FCO 8/2291, Edward Henderson (British Ambassador, Qatar) to the Foreign Secretary, 'Five Years in Qatar,' 26 September 1974.

been made to study this phenomenon systematically. In her 1988 doctoral thesis, Rosemary Hollis compares Britain's role in the Gulf in 1965 with that of 1985. Hollis argues that in security affairs after the withdrawal, 'direct use of force by Britain in the Gulf states themselves had given way to more indirect use, through training, assisting and supplying indigenous forces'.<sup>1139</sup> Britain did, it must be noted, retain a formal role in Gulf security after 1971. Most notably, Britain continued to mastermind the counterinsurgency in Oman until 1975 and kept air bases in Masirah and Salalah up to 1977.<sup>1140</sup> In addition, Britain jointly developed the base at Diego Garcia with the United States in the mid-1970s to maintain a naval presence in the Western Indian Ocean to counter Soviet encroachment.<sup>1141</sup> This is not to mention the later direct British involvement in the form of the Armilla patrol (a Royal Navy presence instigated at the start of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War to protect shipping), as well as the British military contributions to the 1990/1 Gulf War and the invasion and occupation of Iraq (2003-09). Nevertheless, it was the indirect role in security matters that perhaps left a deeper mark. Clive Jones and John Stone in their 1997 joint article argue that previous interpretations assume wrongly that Britain's military role ended in 1971 because they 'equate strategic influence with a continued physical military presence in the region.'<sup>1142</sup> They posit that the provision of service personnel on secondment and on extended contracts from the British armed forces helped to ensure the stability of the small Gulf Arab states against internal threats.<sup>1143</sup>

Recent initiatives by the British government to rejuvenate its defence relations with its former protégés has led to important recent research on the nature of Britain's security role in the area. Efforts to understand Britain's

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<sup>1139</sup> Hollis seeks to measure Britain's adaption to imperial decline, as played out in the Arab Gulf states between 1965 and 1985. This claim is made retrospectively in the preface and acknowledgments of Rosemary Hollis' recent publication, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 Era* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). Rosemary Hollis, 'From Force to Finance: Britain's Adaption to Decline: Transforming Relations with Selected Arab Gulf States, 1965-1985', Ph.D. Thesis (George Washington University, 1988), p. 190 and p. 198.

<sup>1140</sup> J.E. Worrall, 'Britain's Last Bastion in Arabia: The End of the Dhofar War, the Labour Government and the Withdrawal from RAF Salalah and Masirah, 1974-1977,' in Tore T. Petersen (ed.) *Challenging Retrenchment in the Middle East* (Tondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2010),

<sup>1141</sup> Hollis (1988), pp. 198-213 and p. 268.

<sup>1142</sup> Clive Jones and John Stone, 'Britain and the Arabian Gulf: New Perspectives on Strategic Influence,' *International Relations*, Vol. 13 No. 4 (April, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>1143</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

enduring role in the security affairs of the Gulf need to pay more attention to the continuities than the changes.<sup>1144</sup>

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<sup>1144</sup> Gareth Stansfield and Saul Kelly, 'A Return to East of Suez: UK Deployment to the Gulf,' *RUSI Briefing Paper* (April 2013).

## CONCLUSIONS

Any study that explores one state's half-century involvement in the security affairs of a region will find it difficult to deduce a theory that holds valid across different cases and across time. Anomalies inevitably emerge. To be sure, British policy toward, and British involvement in, establishing, developing, and sometimes running local professional forces – namely: salaried, uniformed and centrally controlled state instruments of coercion – varied considerably. Whilst formulating a 'general rule' is problematic, this study has nevertheless shown that the build-up of indigenous coercive forces of its protégés was an important part of Britain's repertoire for managing regional security. By pursuing this broad policy, Britain was behaving like other imperial powers.

Before the twentieth century, the authority of the ruling shaikhs in the Gulf rarely extended much beyond the towns they governed – they lacked the coercive means to enforce their will over outlying areas of their emirates. So long as peace was kept at sea, this lack of control over the interior did not bother Britain. In the years following the First World War, however, the British Government of India began to take a greater interest in the fate of certain rulers who faced internal challenges. Apart from the small detachments of sepoy in Manama and Muscat, Britain did not have land forces stationed in the area to prevent plots against rulers by their families or defend against unexpected tribal attacks from the desert. There were very few incentives for Britain to fill this power gap by garrisoning troops, but plenty of disincentives: hostile inhabitants, an unforgiving climate in summer and malaria in winter. In keeping with its hands-off approach, Britain wanted its protégé rulers in the Gulf to secure their own positions by developing their own military resources. In Muscat, the British actively encouraged the Sultan to develop a force that could dominate the land approaches to Muscat, alleviating the obligation on Britain to intervene if the capital was threatened by amassed tribes from the Omani interior. The reason why Britain supported the establishment of the Bahrain Levy Corps in 1924, in contrast, was to provide the Regent, who was in a weak position vis-à-vis his own family (the Al Khalifah), and who was at the mercy of powerful tribal clans, with an independent means of coercion. In Kuwait, the threat was external. Raids by the *Ikhwan* (religiously inspired tribal fighters) into Kuwaiti territory led Britain in the

1920s to supply the Ruler with armoured cars and training for their crews. In all three cases, the British Government of India wanted the local rulers to take greater responsibility for securing their own territories rather than continually seeking British military assistance in a crisis. This aspiration was not fully realised, for the early lives of these fledgling forces were beset with difficulties.

Made up of imported soldiery – Baluchis from Muscat – the Bahrain Levy Corps proved a disaster and was disbanded after just two years. The Bahrain State Police, which emerged out of the ashes of the Levy Corps, struggled to cope with many of the breakdowns in civil order in Bahrain. In Oman, the Sultan starved the Muscat Levy Corps of funds and whittled it down in size. As a result, it was unable to rein in recalcitrant tribes to the northwest and southeast of Muscat in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus the creation of a professional force for Muscat did not change the fact that the Sultan's very position remained dependent on British military support, as did any pretence that his writ extended beyond Muscat. The fledgling Kuwaiti military was never put to the test against an *ikhwan* raid, let alone a full-scale assault.

Beyond making judgements on whether these early forces served their intended purposes, this study has made a number of additional observations about the types of institutions that were created. Although the formation of state coercive instruments in the 1920s were a collaborative effort between the Government of India and the local rulers, the forces that were formed were based on a British Indian model, even down to the rank structure and uniforms – especially in Muscat and Bahrain. Another distinguishing feature of the forces in Muscat and Bahrain at this time was the importation of soldiers and policemen from abroad. Those British Indian officials in the Gulf charged with organising these forces believed that local coastal Arabs did not make suitable recruits. Using outsiders for protection was not a practice foreign to the rulers. For centuries, ruling shaikhs had used men from out-of-kin groups, especially manumitted slaves, as their personal bodyguards. Indeed, there was a belief on both sides (British officials and local elites) that the loyalty of personnel from abroad could be depended on to a greater extent than local tribesmen who might intrigue against the state.

The establishment of landing sites for the Britain-to-Asia air route and burgeoning British oil production and exploration activities in the 1930s made the domestic stability of Britain's protected states in the Gulf a far more pressing concern for Britain than before. Thus, as Second World War approached, Britain was spurred

to review its security arrangements in Eastern Arabia. Lacking confidence in the ability of the Bahraini and Kuwaiti forces to protect their growing hydrocarbon infrastructure from sabotage, British and American oil workers were organised into volunteer forces in those two early oil producers. In Muscat, Britain paid the Sultan a wartime subsidy to expand his military, calculating that in its present state it would be too weak to repel an Axis-incited tribal advance on the capital. The Second World War brought into sharp relief the fact that Britain's interests in the area – primarily the burgeoning oil sector and the strategic air route – were starting to outgrow the naval-centric presence that had undergirded Britain's position in the area for 120 years. Yet Britain remained reluctant to commit more military resources to the region, especially for internal security duties. To bridge this gap, Britain ramped up its pressure on the local rulers to enhance their indigenous capabilities to maintain order over their territories.

Indian independence in 1947 profoundly affected British involvement in the small Gulf Arab states. Britain turned away from its previous hands-off approach to the internal affairs of the protected states as well as Muscat and Oman. Yet Britain still wanted to avoid, where possible, intervening with its own military whenever its interests or those of its protégés were threatened. In the Trucial States, the need to protect oil prospecting parties and put an end to slave trading led Britain to set up a British-officered, locally recruited levy force. In 1951, the British Government established the Trucial Oman Levies (TOL) by transferring a small team from the Arab Legion to form a nucleus around which the new force would grow. The force was set apart from other local forces inasmuch that it was paid for by the British Government and was under the local control of the Political Resident.

The prospect that local governments might take on greater responsibility for their own security became increasingly attractive to Britain at a time when its ability to project military power abroad was diminishing. Yet, by the end of the 1950s, the question of whether indigenous forces would enable Britain to reduce its cost of protecting the region remained unanswered. At times during the tumultuous mid-1950s, British defence planners and Foreign Office mandarins had such little faith in the ability of the Bahraini police to keep order in the midst of social and labour unrest that they believed no other avenue was open but to rely on the British Army. Whilst instability around the time of the Suez crisis reduced British confidence in the ability of local forces to maintain order, Britain still wanted to reduce the size of its garrison



stationed in the Gulf. Indeed, the garrisoning of additional British Army infantry companies in Bahrain and Sharjah was only ever intended as a covering force, giving Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar time to make improvements to their own security forces.

Even when local forces were judged to have performed well operationally – such as the Trucial Oman Levies against Saudi-backed forces at Buraimi in 1955 – British observers were quick to point out that they still depended on British military support, usually in the shape of RAF transport and combat aircraft and Royal Navy frigates. Moreover, it was British assistance to these forces that was held up as the most important factor in their efficacy. In this way, local forces should be thought of as complementing Britain's military architecture rather than replacing it. When money-sensitive civil servants questioned British expenditure on local forces, supporters of this spending argued that it was less costly in the long-run as greater indigenous capabilities would reduce the likelihood of Britain having to intervene directly and could reduce defence expenditure in the long-term. Ironically, Britain's commitments in Muscat and Oman actually sped up the growth of the Sultan's Armed Forces. The failure of the Sultan's military to defeat rebels operating in the Omani interior in the late 1950s led Britain to take de facto control of the Sultan's Armed Forces in 1958 and to largely bankroll it.

The exponential growth of British involvement in the security scene during the 1950s was not all driven by direct state-to-state assistance; the number of British police and military advisers and experts privately employed by the local rulers increased steadily over this decade. T.E. Lawrence's earlier plea that men should not 'for the glamour of strangeness, go out to prostitute themselves and their talents in serving another race,' went ignored.<sup>1145</sup> Charles Belgrave, who for over 30 years was employed as an adviser to two successive rulers of Bahrain, was just one of a well-entrenched group of Britons who played a central role in the development of the Gulf states outside of British officialdom. Indeed, by the end of the 1950s, there were dozens if not hundreds of former British military officers, policemen, civil servants, and diplomats holding influential posts in the nascent governments of the Gulf Arab states. Some Britons became *éminence grise* figures to the rulers they served. While the influence that private military and security advisers were able to exert was not officially sanctioned by the British Government, their role in helping to maintain

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<sup>1145</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 29.

internal stability did, at most points, conflate with the agenda of the British Government. At other times, however, British officials in the Gulf considered a number of the privately employed British security advisors as liabilities, complaining that their actions ran counter to British interests. The loyalties of many of these British advisors and contract officers were first and foremost to their Arab masters; even though their rapport with British officials might provide access for the latter, it could be just as likely that they would eventually present an obstacle to British official policy. As a reaction to this, British officials in Muscat and Oman worked to replace contract officers with regular loan service officers, over whom they would have a greater measure of control. In Bahrain in the mid-1950s, the British Government put pressure on the Ruler to retire Belgrave, who was seen as ignorant of modern police work and a lightning rod for the Bahraini opposition. The friction between British officials and privately employed Britons only increased in the 1960s as the rulers began displaying greater independence from Britain in their decision-making and their British servants refused to work in the interests of Britain.

British involvement in the Kuwaiti security forces was light compared to Britain's other protected states in the Gulf. It is striking to observe, therefore, that after the country received independence from Britain in 1961, British participation in the Kuwaiti military grew. For Britain, an expanded and effective Kuwaiti military took on more and more significance for its plans to defend Kuwait from an Iraqi attack. This became especially relevant after 1966 when Britain reduced its defence commitment to air support only. Some policy-makers in Britain were hesitant in building up the Kuwaiti military lest it follow the path of other Arab states (most notably Libya at the time) and seize political power. Yet this never occurred – not in any of the Gulf Arab states. Why the militaries of the Gulf Arab states never attempted to seize political control – as they did in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya – is a question that deserves greater exploration, although the monopolisation of the militaries' key leadership positions by ruling family members is the likely reason.

Unlike Kuwait, the build-up of military capacity in the Trucial States and Bahrain was not seen as a security gain for Britain. When Abu Dhabi set out on a course to establish its own military, British officials tried but failed to quash the idea. From Britain's perspective, the development of a defence force in Abu Dhabi would serve to undermine the role of the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS) and would motivate the other Trucial rulers to set up their own private armies, increasing the chance of

military rivalry and conflict in the Trucial States instead of unification. But it was Bahrain's plan to form a Defence Force that worried British officials most. The British Government feared that a Bahrain Defence Force would pose a threat to the Ruler, that it could easily overthrow him. When it came to establishing new police forces and special branches in the Gulf, however, British officials gave these schemes their unreserved support. Indeed, Britain's financial contribution to counter-subversion units in the lower Gulf continued beyond the end of 1971.

Accepting its reduced ability to shape events in the Gulf, Britain reasoned that if it could not stop the rulers from setting up their own armed forces – or prevent them from expanding too rapidly – then it might as well try to steer them in the right direction. The right direction for Britain meant, if possible, that these force should be commanded and trained by British officers (contract or loan service) and that they should use weaponry produced by British manufacturers.

As the end of 1971 approached, British planners began to think more carefully about Britain's post-withdrawal role in the Gulf. They calculated that Britain's ability to remain influential would rest to a large degree on the rulers' continued dependence on Britons to fill critical advisory and leadership positions related to security matters. After all, the presence of British nationals, whether loaned out by Britain or privately employed, was a critical component in the development of indigenous security forces prior 1971 and one of the central planks of the British relationship with the Gulf ruling families. Because the influence of Britons in key positions in the security apparatus was not dependent on the formal aspects of Britain's political and military position in the Gulf, it is perhaps not surprising that it continued long after Britain's formal military withdrawal – right up to the present day.

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