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Two Sides of the Same COIN? Compare and Contrast British Political Warfare in Southern Arabia from 1959 to 1977

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Two Sides of the Same COIN? Compare and Contrast British Political Warfare in Southern Arabia from 1959 to 1977.

David Edward Mason

Thesis submitted to King's College London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dated: 24 September 2023.

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Glossary

AIT	Army Information Team
ATUC	Aden Trade Union Congress
BATT	British Army Training Team
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDOHP	British Diplomatic Oral History Project
Box 500	Security Service (MI5)
CAT	Civil Action Team
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CO	Colonial Office
COI	Central Office of Information
COID	Colonial Office Information Department
COS	Chiefs of Staff
CRD	Cultural Relations Department
CSC	Counter Subversion Committee
DFP	Directorate of Forward Plans
DIO	Dhofar Information Office
DLF	Dhofar Liberation Front
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
FO	Foreign Office
FRA	Federal Regular Army
FSA	Federation of South Arabia
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
IPD	Information Policy Department
IRD	Information Research Department
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JAC	Joint Action Committee
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JWE	Joint Warfare Establishment
KCL	King's College London
LCS	London Controlling Section

LPS	London Press Service
LTSG	Long Term Study Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NATIS	North Atlantic Treaty Information Service
MECA	Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
MOD	Ministry of Defence (UK)
NLF	National Liberation Front
OID	Overseas Information Department
OLOS	Organisation for the Liberation of the Occupied South
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PFLOAG	Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party
PUS	Permanent Under Secretary
PUSC	Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
RAF	Royal Air Force
RIO	Regional Information Office
SAAG	South Arabian Action Group
SAF	Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces
SAS	Special Air Service
Security Service	MI5 (see also Box 500)
SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)
SLO	Security Liaison Officer
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPU	Special Producer Unit
TNA	The National Archives (UK)
UAR	United Arab Republic
VISTRE	Visual Inter-Service Training and Research Establishment
WO	War Office
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

Abstract

This thesis considers the role that political warfare played in British strategy in Southern Arabia between 1959 and 1977, through the examination of two case studies - Aden and Dhofar. It argues that a strategy of coordinated and synchronised, propaganda, psychological warfare/operations and special operations was a way that Britain thought it could counter Communism and Arab nationalism. The aim was to achieve strategic ends, whilst offsetting the deficit in Britain's comparatively overstretched military and economic resources.

Having charted the origins of British political warfare, the objectives of British policy in the Middle East between 1945 and 59 will be examined. British strategy during the period 1959 to 1977 will then be analysed in relation to Aden and Dhofar and assessed in terms of the use of political warfare to support policy goals. How the ways and means of political warfare affected the strategic ends will be key to understanding why political warfare appeared to fail in one case and succeed in the other. Due to the release of new material from the Hanslope Park archive and previously classified files, there is the opportunity to interpret anew the circumstances in which political warfare was or was not applied in the two case studies.

This thesis will argue that the retreat from Aden and the intensification of the conflict in Dhofar resulted from muddled policy making as Britain reacted to changing circumstances, which culminated during the Labour Government of 1964-70. However, as the insurgency in Dhofar intensified from 1968 onwards, the British were presented with a crisis partially of their own making, potentially with consequences not only for their own interests but ramifications in the Cold War. In this campaign, far from pursuing the model counter-insurgency strategy as is often argued, Britain deliberately limited its involvement and supported largely conventional conflict. Rather than viewing the two campaigns in isolation, this thesis argues that they are linked because the decision to withdraw from the region in 1967 and 1968 directly affected the ways used in Dhofar. Both campaigns mark a turning point in Britain's ends, ways and means in Southern Arabia, not because the British stopped engaging in the region but rather because the way they engaged changed.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the academic and personal assistance of those who have had guided me through it to completion.

At King's College London, I would like to thank Professor Michael Goodman and Doctor David Easter who guided me to submission and provided such helpful insight. Further thanks must go to all those at King's who provided comments and encouragement particularly, Professor Kate Utting and Doctor Saul Kelly. I am sure that without all their patience I would not have completed the process and I am truly grateful.

Further, the staff of various archives and libraries including, The National Archives, The Middle East Centre of St Antony's College Oxford, The Bodleian Libraries and The Military Intelligence Museum, were consistently diligent and helpful. This support was very much appreciated.

I am indebted to my family who endured hours of discussion and debate on a subject that they are no doubt glad is over. My parents, Trudy and Colin and relatives, Sand and Ron all deserve a special mention for their support.

I doubt anyone really knows what they are getting into when they start a PhD, least of all those around the individual. My wife, Lorna has always provided her time, support and love during the whole process. Thank you.

Finally, and working on the assumption that he might one day read this, my apologies to my son, Peter. I am now looking forward to having some free time to spend with you!

Introduction

The re-emergence of Russia on the international stage, engaging in unconventional warfare to gain an advantage over other states, has raised parallels with the Cold War.¹ Both scholarly and popular publications continue to emphasise the Russian use of propaganda, subversion and covert action as part of a hybrid warfare strategy.² The term hybrid warfare is too often used as a catch all phrase, when a more comprehensive term to describe this combination of activities is 'political warfare'.³ Whilst the more than decade long campaigns in the Middle East appear to have halted large scale Western military interventions, Britain continues to engage diplomatically and economically with this important region.⁴ Further, as Britain evaluates the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, its supposedly successful record of counter-insurgency continues to be scrutinised.⁵ These issues raise interesting questions regarding Britain's history of identifying ways (conduct of activities) of using her often limited means (resources/tools) to achieve policy ends (objectives). The crux of Britain's position during the Cold War, was how to balance its ambitious ends to its diminishing means. The 'way' therefore would be critical. In this both Conservative and Labour Governments were relatively consistent during the 1945-64 period.⁶ This thesis will investigate how and why Britain used political warfare as its strategic way in Southern Arabia between 1959 and 1977. It will be argued that the objective to remain a global player was not matched by adequate means however skilful a strategy was utilised. These events were a key turning point in British policy in the Middle East.

The two campaigns in South Arabia and Oman have been viewed and studied in isolation to each other, particularly when focused on the military campaigns only.⁷ In South Arabia the British were forced to retreat whereas, in Oman they assisted the Sultan's government to defeat the insurgency. Events rarely happen in isolation and the two campaigns are

¹ Andrew Monaghan, "A 'New Cold War'? Abusing History and Misunderstanding Russia" *Chatham House Research Paper*, (2015): https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150522ColdWarRussiaMonaghan.pdf, accessed on 20 December 2016.

² Andrew Monaghan, "The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare'" *Parameters* 45:4 (2015-16).

³ Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political War: Moving Beyond the Hybrid* (London: Routledge, 2019) p 1-2.

⁴ Peter Mangold, *What the British did: Two Centuries in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2016) p 3.

⁵ Karl Hack, *The Malayan Emergency: Revolution and Counterinsurgency at the End of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁶ Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics, 1964-1970* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009) p 31.

⁷ See for example, Nick Van Der Bijl, *British Military Operations in Aden and Radfan: 100 Years of British Colonial Rule* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2014), which makes one passing reference to Dhofar.

linked by more than simple geography, in that they were both affected by wider international events, particularly in the context of the Cold War. Enemies and adversaries in both Aden and Dhofar had the ideological underpinnings of Marxist-Leninism, as well as Arab nationalism. The campaigns also overlapped each other during a time when Britain was supposedly withdrawing from the region but then appeared to have re-engaged, as its interests were threatened. This leads to questions as to whether British aims changed or whether the strategy of engagement did? Under the title, 'Two Sides of the Same COIN? Compare and Contrast British Political Warfare in Southern Arabia from 1959 to 1977', this thesis will explain historical events, using newly declassified British government documents and assess the existing literature, in order to evaluate past policies and contribute anew to historical analysis of the period. By comparing the campaigns in South Arabia and Oman, this study will examine three overlapping themes. Firstly, an understanding of Britain's global foreign and defence policy, in light of the development of the Cold War and the need to balance competing political, military and economic interests.⁸ Secondly, why this balancing act appeared to fail dramatically in the Middle East when Britain abandoned Southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf and surrendered any pretention to being a world power.⁹ Finally, given that Britain appeared able to identify a successful formula for counter-insurgency during a number of post war campaigns, this thesis will consider why the campaign appeared to fail in Aden and succeeded in Dhofar.

This thesis will argue that the retreat from Aden and the intensification of the conflict in Dhofar resulted from muddled Government policy making, which culminated during the Labour Government of 1964-70.¹⁰ This thesis will consider how this complex process had an impact on the application of political warfare, which can only be fully understood by investigating the two campaigns together. The role of political warfare can be assessed more thoroughly for the first time through the release of a large number of records relating to the Information Research Department (IRD). These Government records reveal, in much greater detail, the inner workings of British political warfare in Southern Arabia and shed light on previously unknown activities. IRD files make clear that the genesis of operations in Aden was through its officials on the ground as the Information Advisor in

⁸ Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p 6.

⁹ John Barrett Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, 1980) p 28.

¹⁰ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat From Empire in the Post War World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) p 294.

Aden planned activity directly with the IRD Special Operations Section.¹¹ This approach created tensions with other Government organisations and meant that political warfare was not effectively cohered. Similar types of activities continued during the campaign in Oman, the details of which are illuminated by new archive material and interviews with a participant. By studying political warfare across the two campaigns and using the new files, this thesis can draw new conclusions on Britain's conduct of the campaigns. The most significant, is the revelation that there was never a system to measure the effectiveness of political warfare activity. With hindsight this means that the utility of political warfare as a way to support campaigns in Southern Arabia was limited, as the impact of its activities was never determined. How and why this was the case can be investigated through this study.

The British were viewed as particularly proficient at conducting political warfare both historically and in the early years of the Cold War.¹² The new IRD material shows that by the 1960s and 70s this was not necessarily the case. Britain during the 1940s and 50s appeared able to tread the delicate path between its continuing international responsibilities, restraining the more confrontational policies of the United States towards the Soviet Union, and promoting coexistence.¹³ This strategy averted the threat of a nuclear confrontation with a view to allowing the UK economy to recover.¹⁴ However, by the late 1950s and early 1960s Britain's global influence was waning in the bipolar world of the Cold War. The cost of maintaining nuclear weapons, deterrent forces in Europe and garrisons across the globe was beginning to bite into the nation's finances. In the Middle East, the Suez crisis damaged British prestige and appeared to show "that without US support or at least agreement, no European nation was capable of wielding global power".¹⁵ But British policy makers at the time disagreed with this, maintaining that British power and influence were still relevant.¹⁶ The challenge for British Governments was how to balance the competing interests of a Cold War role in NATO focused on the European mainland, the advantageous relationship with the USA and the remaining international responsibilities of the residual empire. To be successful, Britain's military means could not

¹¹ TNA, FCO 168/1115 Ashworth to Welser, 2 January 1965.

¹² Kaeten Mistry "Political Warfare" in Timothy Lynch (Ed), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of American Military and Diplomatic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹³ Hughes *Harold Wilson's Cold War* p 14.

¹⁴ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez* p 15.

¹⁵ Klaus Larres, "Britain and the Cold War" in Richard H Immerman and Petra Goedde (Ed) *The Oxford Handbook of The Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p 148.

¹⁶ Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War* p 31.

be stretched too far and her economy could not be asked to provide any more.¹⁷ A strategy that utilised Britain's existing means (potentially offsetting economic weakness), whilst maintaining the extant ends would have been a most attractive proposal. Seemingly successful tightrope walking during the 1940s and 50s and campaigns in the Far East appeared to cement the role of political warfare, particularly its covert aspects, in British strategy.¹⁸

Having previously used political warfare as a successful way to achieve its policy ends, within its meagre means, Britain could be expected to continue this approach. Aden was a key strategic base as a transportation hub between the UK and its Far East colonies, as well as the headquarters of a major garrison force in Southern Arabia.¹⁹ The area was significant not only regionally but also in the Cold War, where British garrisons provided security in the oil rich Persian Gulf. From 1959, as in other British colonies, the colonial administration in Aden was threatened by not only Soviet and Chinese inspired Communism but also Arab nationalism projected from President Nasser's Egypt. Nasser saw an opportunity to exploit the civil war in neighbouring Yemen, to both further expand his own doctrine and influence and to attack British supported states in South Arabia and Aden itself. During 1962 to 1964, Britain pursued covert means as well as diplomacy to counter Nasser in Yemen and strengthen the (soon to be) Federation of South Arabia (FSA), thereby achieving a formula which curbed the more radical political and security threats within Aden, by countering them with the friendly rulers of the inland states. In this way British interests were seemingly balanced in the context of the wider Cold War and decolonisation.

To be successful, the Federation and British plans would need investment of skilled officials in Aden and London as well as financial support and development.²⁰ From the start the financial support was not forthcoming and Charles Johnston, Governor and later High Commissioner of Aden between 1960 and 1963, specifically mentioned the tension

¹⁷ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez* p 26.

¹⁸ David Easter, "British Intelligence and Propaganda during the 'Confrontation', 1963-1966", *Intelligence and National Security* 16:2 (2001) p 97.

¹⁹ The National Archives (TNA), CAB 130/189 GEN 776 Cabinet Meeting, 5 February 1963. For the view from a contemporary non-governmental source see, Gillian King, *Imperial Outpost – Aden: Its place in British Strategic Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) and Saul Kelly (Ed), *Fighting the Retreat from Arabia and the Gulf: The Collected Essays and Reviews of JB Kelly, Volume 1* (Nashville: New English Review Press, 2013) p 183.

²⁰ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 15 and Mangold, *What the British did* p 245.

between the colonial authorities and the Treasury in London.²¹ This lack of adequate financial planning continued, as can be seen by the fact that the Aden base was still being developed when the decision to withdraw was announced.²² The revolution in Yemen in September 1962 and the resulting support for Communist and Arab Nationalist insurgents in South Arabia, meant that security was a paramount threat to the Federation from the start. As Kennedy Trevaskis, High Commissioner of Aden from 1963 to 1964 said, he was trying “to safeguard a military base with Nasser on the doorstep and at a time when there is an international witch hunt in full cry against Colonialism.”²³ However, there continued to be treaties stipulating British protection to the Federation after independence – which had been set for 1968 – with the British base in Aden maintained. Although difficult, the situation was not insurmountable but it required “a British government...[to] commit itself to taking this hard road”.²⁴

The election of the Labour Party in 1964, hindered the chances of the Federation project succeeding.²⁵ Whilst there were elements of continuity in colonial matters between the Labour and Conservative policies and “moderates in those parties shared similar ideas”, ultimately a different approach prevailed.²⁶ Whereas the previous Government had forged links with the tribal leaders, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Anthony Greenwood, planned for a political settlement that would help to build a more representative government. There was however little support in South Arabia for this, as the more moderate political elements had been steadily replaced by more radical ones. These groups had little interest in working with the British dooming Greenwood’s initiative.

The recent releases of IRD material provides further details which assists in analysing why the political warfare campaign can be seen as having failed in Aden and the Protectorates. This is significant because without these records being released, a different narrative of Britain’s withdrawal may have developed. The documents make clear that IRD deliberately pursued unattributable propaganda that focused on attacking Egypt and aimed

²¹ Charles Johnston, *The View From Steamer Point: Being An Account of Three Years in Aden* (London: Collins, 1964) p 38-40. See also Peter Hinchcliffe, John T Ducker & Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat From Aden* (London: IB Tauris, 2007) p 53-54.

²² Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005) p 129.

²³ Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson, 1968) p 200.

²⁴ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 21.

²⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 127.

²⁶ Spencer Mawby, *The Transformation & Decline of the British Empire: Decolonisation After the First World War* (London: Palgrave, 2015) p 44-45. See also Mangold, *What the British did* p 246.

to divide the opposition.²⁷ These activities failed to present any positive reason as to why local people should support the Federal Government. Community relations projects designed to build goodwill with local people were “starved” of funds, which meant there was very limited evidence of any progress under the Federation.²⁸ The worsening security situation in South Arabia between 1964-67 did not see an effective counter-insurgency strategy emerge. This was a symptom of Britain’s defensive strategy in South Arabia, which never invested in developing a workable state and instead presented the local population with a stark choice between a British client government or local Arab fighters. The local population were indifferent to or disliked the Federation which they saw as unrepresentative. They were therefore disinclined to support it.

This disjointed approach to political warfare was already underway when Labour inherited a difficult situation in South Arabia but there were fundamental problems with the machinery of government that prevented a more synchronised approach being undertaken. These issues predated the Labour Government but the inexperience of ministers and the long and drawn-out process of deciding to overtly withdraw from East of Suez meant that policy was delivered piecemeal. The process that led to the decision to withdraw from the Aden base can be seen as an evolution in official thinking.²⁹ The rationale for military bases East of Suez had changed, as the commitment to securing them against the will of the local population diminished the value of them. Harold Wilson considered that the time taken to make the decision to withdraw from East of Suez and retreat from Aden was one of his worst mistakes as Prime Minister.³⁰ The Aden base had been of crucial importance, at the very time when Britain was attempting to balance her overstretched military, diplomatic and economic interests.³¹ The decision to retreat marked a change in the way Britain engaged with the Middle East.

The ultimate choice to withdraw from South Arabia is hard to fault but the way it was implemented demonstrated the overall lack of coherence between policy and strategy. When subsequently faced with a burgeoning insurgency in Oman, Britain was presented with a crisis that was partially of its own making. Having publicly withdrawn from Southern

²⁷ TNA, FCO 168/1112 Ashwood to Elwell, 24 July 1964 and FCO 168/1539 Ashworth to IRD, 24 July 1965.

²⁸ TNA, DEFE 28/164 Wild Visit Report to Chiefs of Staff, 25 March 1963.

²⁹ William D James, “Global Britain’s Strategic Problem East of Suez”, *European Journal of International Security* 6 (2021) p 177.

³⁰ Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) p 243.

³¹ Mangold, *What the British did* p 248.

Arabia and the Persian Gulf between 1967 and 1968 Britain had hoped to achieve “relations with Middle East Countries [that] were on a moral and political basis”.³² This argument emphasises that British withdrawal was about doing the right thing and inevitable in the wider context of decolonisation. This interpretation is highly questionable in light of the records of the IRD and others, which show the persistent use of political warfare to seed continued British influence through discreet or covert means.³³ The campaign in Oman demonstrates how in the right circumstances this could be achieved.

Britain used political warfare during the 1960s and 70s because through its methods, influence could be gained or maintained and national interests secured. The insurgency in Oman was not simply against an enemy supplied and harboured by the regime that it helped install in South Yemen, it also significantly threatened British interests and potentially could cause a critical defeat in the Cold War. Yet far from undertaking the model counter-insurgency campaign described by the SAS Officer, Tony Jeapes, British strategy pursued a covert campaign.³⁴ This utilised economy of effort because, whilst fearing the loss of Oman and potentially other friendly states in the Persian Gulf, Britain could not directly commit forces. Far from counter-insurgency, this campaign focused on destruction of the enemy, rather than separating the population from the insurgent. The impression that the insurgents were successfully defeated by a counter-insurgency strategy, has distorted the view of the means employed. This gives the sense that political warfare successfully supported the campaign in Dhofar, whilst appearing to fail in Aden.³⁵

In studying success and effectiveness Government activity, this thesis acknowledges the debate on the matter.³⁶ Whether a particular policy or strategy was successful or effective will depend upon perspective and this may evolve over time. This makes objective measurement difficult.³⁷ It is possible to find some examples of what practitioners thought at the time and it is interesting to note how contemporary documents could blend measuring effect as opposed to determining something else. Doctrine from the 1950s wrote about

³² Mangold, *What the British did* p 251.

³³ TNA, FCO 168/3418 News Agency Services, 8 May 1968.

³⁴ Tony Jeapes *SAS Secret War* (Godalming: The Book People, 1996) p 11.

³⁵ Geraint Hughes “Demythologising Dhofar: British Policy, Military Strategy, and Counter-Insurgency in Oman, 1963-1976”, *The Journal of Military History* 79:2 (2015) p 428-429, Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in South Arabia 1962-67* (Staplehurst: Spellmount Limited, 2005) p 145 and UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), *Army Field Manual Countering Insurgency Volume 1 – Part 10* (Warminster: Ministry of Defence, 2010) p CS3-2 and CS4-2.

³⁶ Mark Bovens and Paul 'tHart, *Understanding Policy Fiascoes*, (Brunswick: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

³⁷ Allan McConnell, “Policy Success, Policy Failure and Grey Areas In-Between”, *Journal of Public Policy* 30:3 (2010).

measuring the effect of psychological warfare through the completion of a cycle of activity.³⁸ This would see the indication of success in process terms, the cycle having been completed or it had not. In the early 1960s, a different manual identified that through observation of activity before and after an intervention by propaganda or psychological operations, an indication of the “efficiency” of the effect could be ascertained.³⁹ Compounding the issue of seeing success (or failure) as measurable an IRD official noted in 1962 that the organisation was reliant on officers “playing it by ear” when it came to its operations.⁴⁰ From these examples it appears that practitioners from the time also had difficulty in clearly articulating how success or failure would appear.

Breaking down what success or failure means for this thesis, it is worth stating that there will be many shades of grey. During the Oman campaign tactical activity could be seen as having been ‘successful’ in that it achieved its planned aim. Leaflets designed by the British psychological operations team were dropped by aircraft over known insurgent areas. The leaflets acted as a safe conduct pass, which enabled individuals to surrender to Government troops.⁴¹ As increasing numbers of insurgents surrendered, the production of the leaflet and their use as a pass was identified as having been a success in that they allowed individuals to safely surrender. This example is unusual. Clearly demonstrating success or failure in absolute terms is difficult if not impossible. Success may be perceived at different levels or judged on particular merits at different times.⁴² Identifying complete success or absolute failure across the two campaigns being studied is not the goal of this thesis as it is highly unlikely that such a binary approach could be applied.

The identification of what Government policy was at the time makes it possible to assess how and why political warfare was more or less successful at supporting the achievement of particular objectives. What is more difficult is measuring success or failure against fluctuating policy goals. At the time events may have appeared to have necessitated changes to policy based upon a particular perspective. As an example, in the field of foreign policy, Harold Wilson when Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party had to balance

³⁸ R Isaac, *Psychological Warfare Handbook* (Netheravon: Joint Concealment Centre, 1957) p 68, located in the archives of the Military Intelligence Museum.

³⁹ The War Office, *Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations*, (London: HMSO, 1962) p 7-8.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 1110/1562, Strachan to Barclay, 14 May 1962.

⁴¹ John Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

⁴² Oliver Daddow, “Policy Success and Failure: Embedding Effective Learning in Government” Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, (2019): https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Policy_success_and_failure_pdf.pdf, accessed on 14 April 2023.

competing demands over complex issues such as Vietnam, Rhodesia or South Arabia, whilst being mindful of keeping his Party united.⁴³ Policy change could result in the undermining of long-term plans. This was particular the case for political warfare, where changes through its activities could take time to have an effect. The impact of such changes may not have been obvious to people at the time however. Historians having the ability to look over the breadth of events can draw a wider perspective than individuals at the time. What qualifies as success or failure may change over time, which is why this thesis will study political warfare across two campaigns. Structuring the thesis in this manner allows the effects of policy and strategy over two different Governments but in the same geographic area to be compared and contrasted.

This thesis will **investigate and explain why British political warfare appeared to fail in Aden, but succeed in Dhofar between 1959 and 1977**. The question is deliberately constructed as a paradox, in that it assumes that political warfare failed in Aden and succeeded in Dhofar. This prompts further investigation, about British strategy during the middle of the Cold War, why Britain withdrew from Southern Arabia between 1967 and 1968 and why two principal campaigns of counter-insurgency during this period appear to have had such drastically different results. These three themes are about Britain's place in the Middle East at a time of significant change, after her 'moment' had passed and yet seemingly, questions remain as to whether having removed British hard power, soft power capabilities replaced it.⁴⁴ The themes also take into account the continuing re-interpretation and debate about British counter-insurgency operations, particularly in relation to the Dhofar campaign.⁴⁵ By deliberately linking Aden and Dhofar these themes can be examined and explored, assessing the utility of the ways and means, to achieving the ends that Britain pursued.

The discovery of the so called 'migrated archive' at Hanslope Park and its incorporation into the UK National Archive (TNA), presents the opportunity to contribute to the historiography of British strategy during the Cold War and decolonisation, by assessing the impact of political warfare in Aden and Dhofar.⁴⁶ The migrated archive only refers to files

⁴³ Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorized Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993) p 187 and 218.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-1971* (Washington: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) p 2 and Peter Mangold, *What the British did* p 2-9.

⁴⁵ Marc DeVore, "The United Kingdom's last hot war of the Cold War: Oman, 1963-75", *Cold War History* (2011) and Hughes "Demythologising Dhofar" p 431.

⁴⁶ Richard Drayton, "Britain's Secret Archive of Decolonisation": <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/britains-secret-archive-of-decolonisation/> accessed on 30 Oct 2016 and Anthony Badger, "Historians, a legacy of suspicion and the 'migrated archives'", *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:4-5 (2012).

in TNA FCO 141 series. Files of the Information Research Department were released after this, due to a survey of the Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) estate following a lengthy legal case bought by Kenyan nationals detained during the Mau uprising in the 1950s. In his chapter on the British Empire in the Middle East, Peter Sluglett, noted that much was still to be written about this subject, should suitable material become available.⁴⁷ The new IRD files on Southern Arabia certainly provide the opportunity to engage with the continuing reappraisal of British counter-insurgency.⁴⁸ But more significantly the new material provides evidence of Britain's practice of using political warfare to shape attitudes, behaviours and perceptions. The lack of detailed records on Britain's use of propaganda, psychological and other special operations during the 1960s and 70s has prevented a comprehensive study of the subject. This has meant that a narrative has been constructed that has not included the scale of unattributable propaganda produced, the deliberate forgery of documents to create division nor the complications and tensions that these practices caused within the British Government and Armed Forces. Previous campaign studies, such as those by Spencer Mawby on Aden or James Worrall on Oman, benefitted from the thorough examination of Government records then available.⁴⁹ The IRD material and other archival files and interviews allow this thesis to focus on political warfare across both campaigns and provide a different perspective. The campaigns in Southern Arabia are normally cited in isolation; a comparison between a failed one in Aden and the supposedly model campaign in Dhofar enables a more nuanced view to be put forward in this study.⁵⁰

The primary focus of this thesis is about Britain's use of political warfare as a strategy during the Cold War and specifically in the counter-insurgency campaigns in Aden and Dhofar. In 1942 a paper by the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) defined the meaning of political warfare as being:

“the systematic process of influencing the will and directing the actions of peoples...according to the needs of higher strategy...[Its] ultimate aim is to win the “War of Ideas”...[and] requires...the mutual confidence of the Foreign

⁴⁷ Peter Sluglett, “Formal and Informal Empire in the Middle East”, Robin W Winks (Ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p 435.

⁴⁸ See for example Karl Hack, “Iron Claws on Malaya: the Historiography of the Malayan Emergency”, *Journal of South Asian Studies* 30:1 (1999).

⁴⁹ See Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* and James Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman: Political, Military and Diplomatic Relations at the End of Empire* (London: IB Tauris, 2014).

⁵⁰ John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p 130 and 142-145.

Office, the Fighting Services...and other agencies and, with due regard for security, the disclosure of such secret plans, intelligence or policies as are necessary for its operations. Political warfare operates overtly (i.e., through "open" broadcasting) and covertly (through "black" agencies). Political warfare must be geared to strategy, continually linked to, and in consultation on, the day to day conduct of the war."⁵¹

The paper specified that propaganda and psychological warfare were instruments of political warfare but the terms themselves provided only a "partial definition" which was inadequate when considering the totality of what could be achieved in support of wider strategy and policy.⁵² Political warfare also supported the achievement of surprise and so deception activities should be included too.⁵³ These instruments of political warfare are intrinsically linked and this thesis will therefore use political warfare as a whole when considering the question in order to provide a more nuanced view of the interplay between the component activities. To look at the question through one instrument alone would not allow for a comparison of the information methods used in Aden and Dhofar. As the 1942 definition states, only when combined with intelligence and in cooperation with other agencies or departments could the activities of political warfare provide an effect greater than if used in isolation to one another. Political warfare is therefore a comprehensive term to describe the overall outcomes of propaganda, psychological warfare and other special operations when used to achieve British objectives in Southern Arabia between 1959 and 1977.

Political warfare may be combined with diplomacy, economic warfare and violence but primarily workings through "the use of words, images and ideas"⁵⁴ The communicative aspect of political warfare's coercive nature is the primary way to weaken or destroy an opponent's will. The creation, deployment, and synchronisation of these coercive methods are a function of strategy which aims to achieve policy through an alternative option to direct military action. Recent scholarly work has narrowed the concept of political warfare espoused by George Kennan at the beginning of the Cold War.⁵⁵ This is helpful as the much narrower definition sees political warfare "inherently...connected" to counter-

⁵¹ TNA, FO 898/101 Political Warfare Executive: The Meaning, Techniques and Methods of Political Warfare, 1942 p 11.

⁵² Ibid, p 1.

⁵³ Ibid, p 2.

⁵⁴ Paul Smith, *On Political War* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1989) p 3.

⁵⁵ George Kennan, The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare, 30 April 1948: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf?v=94>.

insurgency as a way of “seeking *direct* [author’s emphasis] political outcomes”.⁵⁶ This provides a more realistic interpretation of why and how political warfare helps to achieve control over a population. Traditional British management of both formal and informal empire in the Middle East eschewed the use of force and officials were expected to understand the local population in order to pre-empt any trouble.⁵⁷ The decline of the former wartime alliance directly affected British interests and her overseas empire was threatened by the expansionist influences of the Soviet Union and Communist ideology. As well as the USSR, British interests in the Middle East were also increasingly threatened by the growth and spread of Arab nationalism. In this way the investigation and analysis of two campaigns of decolonisation, facilitated by the release of previously classified papers of the organisations that carried out political warfare, offers the opportunity for fresh insights.

The British Government used the term ‘political warfare’ to describe the informational aspects of conflict since at least the Second World War and the term was in use well into the 1970s.⁵⁸ When first established in 1940 the Special Operations Executive (SOE) was responsible for both subversion and sabotage, the former including unattributable propaganda. When the PWE was formed in 1941 it took over responsibility for the creation and distribution of much of Britain’s wartime covert propaganda. This did not stop friction between the two organisations over the respective roles of each and SOE continued with “political subversion” and maintained a propaganda section called D/Q throughout the war.⁵⁹ Tensions between the two organisations are somewhat understandable. The original construct of SOE brought together subversion and special operations, “at heart a form of political warfare” and deconflicting its and PWE’s operations remained somewhat of a problem throughout the war.⁶⁰ Although disbanded after the war, a number of former members of bodies, like the SOE and PWE, took up posts in Cold War

⁵⁶ Christian Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy: Counterinsurgency and the Illusion of Control* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p 16.

⁵⁷ Mangold, *What the British did* p 7.

⁵⁸ TNA, FO 898/101, Political Warfare Executive: The Meaning, Techniques and Methods of Political Warfare, 1942. TNA, FCO 168/7224 Ashworth report to Omani Minister of Information, 16 May 1974.

⁵⁹ William Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: The Special Operations Executive 1940-1945* (London: St Ermin’s Press, 2002) p 772-773 and 756, 763 and 780.

⁶⁰ Neville Wylie, “Ungentlemanly Warriors or Unreliable Diplomats? Special Operations Executive and ‘irregular political activities’ in Europe” in N Wylie, *The Politics and Strategy of Clandestine War: Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (London: Routledge, 2007) p 111 and Eunan O’Halpin, “‘Hitler’s Irish Hideout’ A Case Study of SOE’s Black propaganda Battles” in M Seaman (Ed), *Special Operations Executive: A New Instrument of War* (London: Routledge, 2006) p 203. See also TNA, FO 898/28 Report to the Director General PWE, 30 November 1942 for an example of the debate between SOE and PWE over who was responsible for covert broadcasting to support subversion and who conducted psychological warfare.

political warfare organisations principally, the Information Research Department (IRD) in the Foreign Office (FO) and the Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP) in the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The IRD was responsible for the propaganda aspects of political warfare, whilst the DFP supported efforts with deception, psychological operations and community relations. A number of cross-departmental committees attempted to synchronise, coordinate and integrate the various methods at different times. Of the two IRD has the greater body of literature and is consequently more well-known.⁶¹

Although research into the IRD has continued, specific operational details on particularly the Middle East beyond 1964 have been lacking, with the standard work on IRD making only one reference to Aden and none on Oman.⁶² The release of new records from the IRD has been judged by historians as “among the most important of the past two decades”.⁶³ The new IRD material helps to explain the deliberate use of political warfare activities and provides details beyond what was previously known. For example, that the IRD collaborated with companies such as Reuters to ensure “a measure of political influence” was maintained after Britain officially withdrew from East of Suez.⁶⁴ More controversially that the interception of mail and the use of forgery were intrinsic parts of the political warfare arsenal in both South Arabia and Oman.⁶⁵ These revelations are not only interesting but alter the understanding of Britain’s strategy in Southern Arabia. As well as this, the new material provides greater detail on IRD’s relationships across Government. This allows investigation into how the effect of political warfare to “influence the opinions...attitudes and behaviours of all communities” was or was not measured.⁶⁶ Through such evaluation, it should have been possible to demonstrate the impact of

⁶¹ See, Lyn Smith, “Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department 1947-77”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 9:1 (1980), Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53* (London: Routledge, 2004), John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2006) and Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998). Scholarly articles on the DFP include Huw Dylan, “Super-weapons and Subversion: British Deterrence by Deception Operations in the Early Cold War”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38:5 (2015) and more recently, “SIS, Grigori Tokaev, and the London Controlling Section: New Perspectives on a Cold War Defector and Cold War Deception”, *War in History*, 26:4 (2019).

⁶² See for example, Simon MW Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda: the Foreign Office Information Research Department in the Middle East and Africa 1954-1963* (Thesis for Doctor Philosophy: University of Hertfordshire, 2013). Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain’s Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* p 87.

⁶³ Rory Cormac quoted in Jason Burke, “Secret British’ Black propaganda’ Campaign Targeted Cold War Enemies”, *The Guardian*, 14 May 2022: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/14/secret-british-black-propaganda-campaign-targeted-cold-war-enemies-information-research-department>.

⁶⁴ TNA, FCO 168/3418, British News Agency Services Annex B, 11 July 1968 p 6.

⁶⁵ TNA, FCO 168/1115 Ashworth to Welser, 2 January 1965, FCO 168/1537 Ashworth to Welser, 19 March 1965 and Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013 and 21 February 2014.

⁶⁶ UK MOD, *Quelling Insurgency* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office (HMSO) 1965) p 7-4.

political warfare on both strategy and policy through the influencing of will.⁶⁷ That this does not appear to have been the case, provided the opportunity for this thesis to consider anew how and why British strategy and policy in Southern Arabia was misaligned.

British taxonomy for political warfare was fraught with difficulty during the Cold War period. At times a number of terms with meanings that were broadly similar or related to one specific element of what this thesis describes as political warfare were used, for example: Special Political Action, psychological warfare/operations, community relations and strategic deception. The use of overlapping terminology seems to be a hallmark of this time. In 1957 a member of the Information Policy Department asked, “what on earth is “politico-military psychological warfare?!”, when presented with an assessment from Middle East Land Forces.⁶⁸ As well as political warfare, the term ‘counter subversion’ appears to have entered the vernacular of British covert action during the 1950s. This phrase became inter-changeable with aspects of political warfare and saw, “clandestine activities, whether by propaganda or by operations directed against communism or, in the colonies, subversive forms of nationalism” as its hallmark.⁶⁹ Extensive use would be made of these techniques in Southern Arabia and it was a specific role of the DFP which was noted in its terms of reference.⁷⁰

Secrecy was a key element of political warfare and counter-subversion although the ‘compartmentalisation’ of certain activities was not helpful to coordinating the output and making the effect greater than the sum of its parts.⁷¹ In Borneo and Southern Arabia, “Special Political Action and Special Operations both...involved secret...interventions and thus demanded very tightly controlled coordinating sets of policies, structures and practices”.⁷² By examining relevant government policies, departmental committees and organisations in the light of newly released material, the concept of British political warfare can be explored, allowing an assessment to be made of how well elements of political

⁶⁷ UK MOD, *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-00: Campaign Execution*, 3rd edition (Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2009) p 5-6: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre>.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO 953/1740 Minutes CCB Stewart, 26 March 1957.

⁶⁹ TNA, PREM 11/1582 Brook to Eden, 28 November 1955.

⁷⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Annex A Counter Subversion Committee, 10 May 1966 p 2.

⁷¹ Chikara Hashimoto, *British Intelligence, Counter Subversion, and ‘Informal Empire’ in the Middle East, 1949-63* (Thesis for Doctor Philosophy: University of Aberystwyth, 2013).

⁷² Gregor Davey, “Conflicting worldviews, mutual incomprehension: The production of intelligence across Whitehall and management of subversion during decolonisation 1944-1966”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25:3 (2014) p 551. For an example of archival material on the specifics of counter-subversion in Aden see TNA, FO 371/174511 Counter Subversion Measures in the Yemen and Aden 1964.

warfare were integrated. In some particularly important cases, such as the use of political warfare to support the defeat of Arab nationalism in Aden, an interest in solely covert means was potentially detrimental to the formation of other policies.⁷³ Therefore, an examination into why covert propaganda played such a central part in Aden at certain times, potentially to the detriment of any other tools of political warfare will be important. Similarly, the secrecy surrounding the operations in Dhofar has clouded the interpretation of other aspects of the campaign, such as the informational and economic effects. The Journalist Ian Cobain has recently written about how the Dhofar war was “so politically repugnant” that “a decision was taken that this war should be fought in complete secrecy”.⁷⁴ The veracity of these and similar comments will be examined in subsequent chapters. The use of political warfare as the lens for analysis in this thesis allows for a comprehensive examination of British policy during the Cold War and specifically in the Middle East. By looking at the political warfare strategy in Aden and Dhofar together using the files of the IRD and DFP, a greater understanding of the two campaigns is possible. This approach will allow this thesis to add to the continuing debate on British counter-insurgency.⁷⁵

Literature Review

The decision to focus on British political warfare and the two case studies of Aden and Dhofar is explained by three factors. Firstly, the opportunity arising from the release of material from Hanslope Park, including a substantial number of new IRD records.⁷⁶ Secondly, and combined with the first, the use of other previously classified government files in The National Archives. Specifically, the files of the DFP used in combination with the IRD records, allows for new insights to be drawn through Britain’s use of political warfare.⁷⁷ Thirdly, the ongoing reassessment of British counter-insurgency during decolonisation. How so-called hidden history has come to influence interpretations of the past has become a subject for both historians and journalists.⁷⁸ This means the topic has

⁷³ Spencer Mawby, “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism: Information Policy and Propaganda in South Arabia at the End of Empire”, in Greg Kennedy and Christopher Tuck (Ed), *British Propaganda and Wars of Empire: Influencing Friend and Foe 1900-2010*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014) p 179.

⁷⁴ Ian Cobain, *The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation* (London, Portobello Books, 2016) p 72.

⁷⁵ Thomas R Mockaitis, “The Minimum Force Debate: Contemporary Sensibilities Meet Imperial Practice”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:4-5 (2012).

⁷⁶ These can predominantly be found at The National Archives under file references FCO 168 and 174.

⁷⁷ The records of the DFP are held at The National Archives under file reference DEFE 28.

⁷⁸ Cobain, *The History Thieves*.

garnered wider interest beyond purely academic literature.⁷⁹ This thesis is able to use these new sources to make a fuller assessment of why and how Britain used political warfare in Aden and Dhofar than has previously been possible. Examination of this new material, with reference to other primary and secondary sources, can refine existing theories on the role of political warfare, as well as its means. With this new material available it is necessary to see how this study fits into the wider literature of events. Broadly this is through the examination of the concept of political warfare, a term that has seen a renewed use.⁸⁰ It also means looking at events in the context of the wider Cold War, during the end of the British Empire, during which a number of counter-insurgency campaigns were fought, of which the case studies are two linked examples.

Political Warfare

Looking firstly at political warfare as a means of British strategy, the concept has not been covered as extensively as other aspects of strategic history or military-intelligence history. The general theory of Political Warfare has seen more demand from an American market in recent years.⁸¹ Scholars such as Lawrence Freedman in his work, *Strategy: A History*, emphasise the importance of deception, or more broadly covert activities in the achievement of a state's objectives.⁸² This idea of the need to blend overt and covert measures is something that Spencer Mawby, Huw Bennett and Rory Cormac have commented on in their research on British strategy in South Arabia.⁸³ Other works by Colin Gray and Hew Strachan are also useful in detailing the use of specific techniques to

⁷⁹ Mawby, *The Transformation & Decline of the British Empire* p 102-104 and Sathnam Sanghera, *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*. London: Penguin, 2021.

⁸⁰ Mark Galeotti, *The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way Of Warfare* (London: Yale University Press: 2022) p 12.

⁸¹ Recent publications include Christian Whiton, *Smart Power: Between War and Diplomacy* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2013) and J Michael Waller (Ed), *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda and Political Warfare* (Washington: Institute of World Politics Press, 2008).

⁸² Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p 44 and Patrick Porter, "Review of 'Strategy: A History' by Lawrence Freedman", *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 159:4 (2014) p 117.

⁸³ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* and "The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism". Huw Bennett, "Words are cheaper than bullets': Britain's Psychological Warfare in the Middle East, 1945-60", *Intelligence and National Security* (2019). Rory Cormac, "Coordinating Covert Action: The Case of the Yemen Civil War and the South Arabian Insurgency", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36:5 (2013). Bennett's other work includes, "'Detainees Are Always One's Achilles Heel': The Struggle Over the Scrutiny of Detention and Interrogation in Aden, 1963-1967", *War in History* 23:4 (2016). Cormac's other works include: "The Pinprick Approach: Whitehall's Top Secret Anti-Communist Committee and the Evolution of British Covert Action Strategy", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16:3 (2014), Rory Cormac, Michael S Goodman & Tom Holman, "A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action", *The RUSI Journal* 161:2 (2016), Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies: British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishing Ltd, 2013) and Richard Aldrich and Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers* (London: William Collins, 2016).

pursue national policy by other means.⁸⁴ As a concept specific to why and how it was used by the British, political warfare has yet to be comprehensively studied. By using two case studies with such different outcomes, this thesis offers the opportunity to look beyond individual methods and assess the utility of political warfare as a part of broader British policy and strategy. This is different from what other works have done where the topics of policy and strategy have been unable to link Britain's use of political warfare because the evidence was previously unavailable.

The growth in the study of how intelligence has helped inform policy and strategy making, has also unearthed details of previously unknown activities, which can be found in the works of Stephen Dorril and Richard Aldrich.⁸⁵ The work of Calder Walton relying on access to previously unavailable material from the Security Service (MI5) and file releases from the migrated archive, also gives a new perspective on this covert aspect of British strategy during decolonisation. Walton particularly highlights the dearth of research on psychological warfare and specifically the DFP, two areas this study will investigate further.⁸⁶ Like the discovery of new documents in French archives having added to the understanding of the use of "covert political action", the relationship between the two political warfare organisations (the DFP and IRD) and the intelligence services can be better understood.⁸⁷ The understanding of the use of intelligence for political warfare and its link to Special Political Action adds to the scholarship in this area. The particular use of IRD's Special Operations Section in South Arabia is interesting because it shows how activities were generated from Aden, rather than directed from London. These activities also made much greater use of deliberately unattributable or 'black' material than was previously thought. This matters because it changes previous interpretations that IRD "rarely" used these methods as the files provide evidence that they in fact did.⁸⁸ More

⁸⁴ Colin Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (London: Routledge, 2007) and Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For examples of the contemporary debate around soft, hard and smart power see Joseph S Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

⁸⁵ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Forth Estate, 2001) and Richard Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2000).

⁸⁶ Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London: Harper Press, 2013) p 200.

⁸⁷ Meir Zamir, *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East: Intelligence and Decolonisation, 1940-48* (London: Routledge, 2015) p14. For examples of these activities in relation to Aden and Dhofar see, Duff Hart-Davis, *The War That Never Was: The True Story of the men who Fought Britain's Most Secret Battle* (London: Arrow Books, 2011), Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004) and Geraint Hughes, "A Proxy War in Arabia: The Dhofar Insurgency and Cross-Border Raids into South Yemen", *The Middle East Journal* 69:1 (2015).

⁸⁸ Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-77* p xvi and Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 1.

fundamentally this study has identified the lack of targeting and evaluation of political warfare, particularly in South Arabia but which continued during the Oman campaign and beyond. This is surprising given the investment in political warfare and means this study can draw conclusions on a weakness in Britain's approach that was previously not possible.

The Cold War and British Decolonisation

A more recent area of study (and one linked to the idea of pursuing all avenues open to government) is in looking at the cultural, informational and ideological aspects of the Cold War and decolonisation.⁸⁹ In his study of British propaganda in the Middle East, James Vaughan laments that the "psychological dimension" of British actions has not been considered alongside more traditional themes of defence and diplomacy.⁹⁰ Since the publication of this work and possibly due to the interest in the idea of 'influence' or information operations in governmental circles during the Iraq and Afghan conflicts a number of works have been published on this subject, but the most scholarly is the edited volume by Greg Kennedy and Christopher Tuck.⁹¹ These works link the conceptual and historical, discussing current thinking of the use of soft power through a number of British case studies.

Looking wider than a conceptual or organisational focus though, the British Government's policy of declassification allows for a periodic appreciation of official records in areas such as defence and diplomacy, identifying of thematic issues such as decolonisation and appraisals of the personalities involved during the Cold War.⁹² Dealing specifically with the ending of Britain's East of Suez role, it also raises wider questions of Britain's decolonisation in the Middle East. In this debate, major works have been constructed around a number of theories, which range from seeing the winding up of empire as a

⁸⁹ Tony Shaw, "Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War", *Contemporary British History* 19:2 (2005) p 109.

⁹⁰ James Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-57: Unconquerable Minds* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) p 4-6.

⁹¹ Greg Kennedy and Christopher Tuck (Ed), *British Propaganda and the Wars of Empire: Influencing Friend and Foe 1900-2010* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁹² For example, Richie Ovendale (Ed), *British Defence Policy Since 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Sean Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War 1945-1991* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); John Darwin, *The Rise and Fall of the British World System: The Historical Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee* (London: Riverrun, 2016); DR Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010) and Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992).

conscious social change driven from Britain itself, to the results of the bipolar world of the Cold War and the relative decline of Britain's power and influence.⁹³ The historian, John Darwin identifies a more systematic approach, which looks for an explanation of the end of empire by "integrating the different arenas of political change".⁹⁴ Darwin's major work on the subject of decolonisation identified the economic and political weakness of Britain in the post war world as major factors in the withdrawal from empire.⁹⁵ In attempting to understand Britain's apparent 'choice between Europe and the World', Saki Dockrill's work on the withdrawal from East of Suez is important, because it identifies the different perspectives to the decision to withdraw and the particular role of prominent government ministers.⁹⁶ More recently the historian, Nigel Ashton, produced a study that focuses on the singular role of the Prime Minister in British actions in the Middle East.⁹⁷

By drawing on such works, this thesis can assess the Government decision making process and its impact on political warfare anew. It contributes to the existing scholarship by investigating this new evidence, analysing it and argues that this process was not just ineffective but actually created the conditions for political warfare to support or not support a campaign. Without understanding the context of campaign, Britain's machinery of government allowed policy to drift which had an impact on political warfare as a way to achieve strategic objectives. In South Arabia muddled and piecemeal policy was a contributing factor to the failure of political warfare to support the campaign more fully. In Oman the particular circumstances were more favourable and political warfare could better support operations.

South Arabia

The withdrawal from Aden is often marked down as "a watershed moment dividing a period of imperial assertiveness from an era of...inevitable decline".⁹⁸ In this, the

⁹³ For an example of the former argument see John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (London: Random House, 1959) and of the latter Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to decolonisation 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹⁴ John Darwin, "Decolonisation and the End of Empire", Robin W Winks (Ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p 550.

⁹⁵ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*. See also John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2006).

⁹⁶ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez*.

⁹⁷ Nigel Ashton, *False Prophets: British Leaders' Fateful Fascination with the Middle East from Suez to Syria* (London: Atlantic Books, 2022).

⁹⁸ Spencer Mawby, "Orientalism and the Failure of British Policy in the Middle East: The Case of Aden", *History* 95:319 (2010).

withdrawal is seen in ideological terms by “contemporary commentators and later historians, in an almost Whiggish or Marxist manner, as seemingly an inevitable result of the retreat of the British Empire”.⁹⁹ Works by contemporaries such as the last High Commissioner of Aden, Humphrey Trevelyan (1967) and the then Secretary of State for Defence, Dennis Healey, both emphasise this chain of events.¹⁰⁰ But how far is the view presented in memoirs actually the case? In Aden, for example, the decision to quit meant that Britain handed over sovereignty to the National Liberation Front (NLF), one of the two insurgent groups it had been fighting, who espoused a doctrine of Marxist-Leninism. The NLF were later responsible for harbouring the guerrilla’s that Britain would be engaged against in Oman. These events do not seem to echo the words of Trevelyan, when he said “[t]he local boys had made good” about the NLF.¹⁰¹ Compared with other post war ‘bush fire’ campaigns Aden has received relatively little scholarly attention. A significant account of the military campaign was produced by Jonathan Walker in *Aden Insurgency* and Hinchliffe, Ducker & Holt in, *Without Glory in Arabia*, make extensive use of evidence from participants and questions some of the assumptions in previous works on the success of the withdrawal.¹⁰² None however, directly link the outcome in Aden with the campaign in Dhofar as this thesis will.

Accounts and interpretations of British policy and strategy in South Arabia started to appear both during and immediately after 1967.¹⁰³ Many attempted to justify individual or government decision making. The most recent and diligent attempt to reconstruct official thinking of the period can be found in Spencer Mawby’s work. Since its publication a seminal conference, hosted by Royal United Services Institute, brought together officials and scholars. This led to the publication of a special issue of the *Middle Eastern Studies Journal*, demonstrating that there continues to be academic interest in the campaign.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Saul Kelly “Vanishing Act: Britain’s Abandonment of Arabia and Retreat from the Gulf”, Robert Johnston and Timothy Clack (Eds), *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover and Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p 169.

¹⁰⁰ Humphrey Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1970) and Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1989).

¹⁰¹ Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution* p 263.

¹⁰² Walker, *Aden Insurgency* and Hinchliffe, Ducker & Holt, *Without Glory*.

¹⁰³ See for example, King’s, *Imperial Outpost – Aden* and Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*. Julian Paget’s, *Last Post: Aden 1964-1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) which focused on the military component of the campaign followed soon after. RJ Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule 1839-1967* (London: Hurst & Company, 1975) was the first scholarly account. JB Kelly’s, *Arabia, The Gulf & the West* combined a blistering account of the inconsistencies in government decision making in Aden with its impact on the Gulf, bring the events to a new audience in the 1980s.

¹⁰⁴ *Middle Eastern Studies*, 53:1 (2017). An edited volume was published in 2020, Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds), *Britain’s Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020).

Even so the campaign in Aden has often taken a back seat in histories of Britain's role in the Middle East.¹⁰⁵ The campaign is often lumped into the end of Britain's role East of Suez, effectively viewing the withdrawal as the process of decolonisation being complete – resulting in the end of empire. Such a view misses the fact that almost as soon as Britain withdrew from Aden, it was back fighting a long campaign in Oman. If formal empire was gone then the maintenance of residual influence remained important for Britain even beyond decolonisation.¹⁰⁶

Given the contentious nature of British decolonisation and particularly the manner in which the British withdrew from Aden, it might be hoped that the Hanslope Park material could provide conclusive evidence on British decision making. So far, in regard to South Arabia, its revelations have been most significant in the field of British propaganda and psychological operations. This thesis has the opportunity to use this new material to examine political warfare as a way to support the achievement of British objectives in South Arabia. It provides a different perspective, contributing to the historical debate by demonstrating how political warfare became more important to Britain as it attempted to maintain a degree of influence in South Arabia. The increased focus on covert ways and means to fight back against Arab nationalism failed to build support for the Federal Government. In this respect the evidence of the IRD files offers the opportunity to refine some of the previous conclusions by historians such as Spencer Mawby. Whilst he recognised that “Machiavellianism, Keeni-meeni or jiggery pokery”, short hand for some political warfare activities, had all been practiced in Aden, the evidence actually shows how uncoordinated the operations were.¹⁰⁷ Mawby concluded that “British propagandists” made use of a “strategy which urged the local population to resist the influence” of President Nasser's Egypt and continue to collaborate with Britain is contradicted by this new evidence.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the focus of IRD on covert operations actually brought it into conflict with the other political warfare organisation in South Arabia, the DFP.¹⁰⁹ This is important because it allows this thesis to consider why no persuasive approach was undertaken and if such an approach would have made any difference to Britain's often muddled policy over the entirety of the campaign in South Arabia. By using this thesis' definition of political warfare both the propaganda produced by IRD and the psychological

¹⁰⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 189.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Hack, 'Unfinished Decolonisation and Globalisation', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47:5 (2019) p 831.

¹⁰⁷ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 186.

¹⁰⁸ Mawby, “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism” p 189.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/155 Wild to Hancock, 19 November 1964.

operations and community relations of the DFP can be analysed. This approach goes further than other works on South Arabia have, because the new material from the IRD and other sources provide the opportunity to contribute to the debate on events through the perspective of political warfare.

Oman

Historians have unpicked the ideological character of the support provided to the Oman insurgents, adding a new lens through which to see the conflict.¹¹⁰ Whilst an explanation of the Maoist ideological slant to the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) provided through interviews with former members is very detailed, the focus by Toby Mattiesen on the 'internationalist' doctrine of the group is more persuasive. Mattiesen contextualises the Marxist revolutionary element of the Dhofar insurgency in the political changes occurring in the region. These would be the formation of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the waning of Arab nationalism.¹¹¹ This is a significant point as it helps to link the campaigns in Southern Arabia beyond just time and geography. It is highly likely that the British assumed in 1966 that they would be dealing with an Arab nationalist successor regime in Aden and they did not anticipate the significance of the threat to their interests in Oman. The misunderstanding of the NLF and the inconsistent decision making of British Government ministers had led directly to the establishment of a supportive state for the insurgents in Oman. Spencer Mawby's work on South Arabia does not link the decisions taken in 1967 with the ramifications for neighbouring Oman.¹¹² On the one hand this is understandable because the work analyses the British Government's actions in South Arabia, but by doing so in isolation to the subsequent campaign in Oman the account fails to assess the consequences of decisions.¹¹³ The interpretation of British Government actions over the two

¹¹⁰ Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p 4 and 108-109 and Toby Mattiesen, "Red Arabia: Anti-Colonialism, the Cold War and the Long Sixties in the Gulf States" in Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young and Joanna Waley-Cohen (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (London: Routledge, 2018) p 98-99.

¹¹¹ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016) p 254.

¹¹² Spencer Mawby, "The 'Big Lie' and the 'Great Betrayal': Explaining the British Collapse in Aden" in Nigel J Ashton (Ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-73* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) p 167 and 183-184. Interestingly another scholarly work on Labour foreign policy does make this link. See John Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970: International Policy Volume 2* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2009) p 97.

¹¹³ James Worrall, "Between Withdrawal and Greater Engagement: The Aden Abandonment and its Impacts on British Policymaking Towards Oman, 1968-72" in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds) *Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 153-168.

contemporaneous campaigns allows for the analysis of whether a different approach to the withdrawal from South Arabia could have altered the conflict in Oman.

In the case of the campaign in Dhofar, the lack of primary sources covering the period in detail before 2007 saw studies of the campaign rely on memoirs of participants.¹¹⁴ The involvement of the SAS in the Oman conflict during the 1970s has done much to mythologise the campaign.¹¹⁵ New interpretations of the Dhofar campaign, like those by Marc DeVore and Geraint Hughes, identify that it is far from clear whether Dhofar was actually a counter-insurgency campaign at all.¹¹⁶ They argue that a more conventional approach was undertaken, which was not based on 'hearts and minds'.¹¹⁷ Until these new interpretations, Dhofar has largely been portrayed as a model counter-insurgency campaign that learnt from previous events.¹¹⁸ This orthodox view argues that British counter-insurgency pursued a strategy and tactics within the principles of 'minimum force' and as such used popular political and military measures to win the hearts and minds of the population.¹¹⁹ This view is now being challenged with the idea that in fact the British authorities used a coercive hearts and minds strategy throughout their colonial counterinsurgencies, for example in the work of David French, Douglas Porch and Karl Hack.¹²⁰

David French comments that for too long there has been the assumption that the British form of counter-insurgency was the ideal type and that tactics and techniques emphasised the rule of law and the use of minimum force. This potentially offers the view that British

¹¹⁴ See for example, John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1982), General Sir Peter De La Billière, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), Ian Gardiner, *In the Service of the Sultan* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2006), Major General Ken Perkins, *A Fortunate Soldier* (London: Brassey's, 1988), Tony Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: the Story of the SAS* (Glasgow: Wm Collins and Sons, 1982) and John Pimlott, "The Dhofar Campaign, 1970-75" in IFW Beckett and J Pimlott (Eds), *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-Insurgency* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985).

¹¹⁵ David French, *Army, Empire & Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p 1. Examples of specific works include, Roger Cole and Richard Belfield, *SAS Operation Storm: Nine Men Against Four Hundred* (London: Hodder, 2012) and Rowland White, *Storm Front* (London: Corgi Books, 2012).

¹¹⁶ DeVore, "The United Kingdom's Last Hot War of the Cold War" p 2-3 and Hughes "Demythologising Dhofar" p 425-426.

¹¹⁷ Marc DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory: Revisiting the Dhofar Counterinsurgency, 1963-1975", *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:1 (2012) p 145.

¹¹⁸ See commentary in Hughes, "Demythologising Dhofar" p 424-426 and DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 144-145.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p 93.

¹²⁰ David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Karl Hack, "Everyone Lived in Fear: Malaya and the British Way of Counter-Insurgency" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:4-5 (2012).

decolonisation was relatively peaceful and benign. French goes on to state that viewing British counter-insurgency through “the [Robert] Thompson inspired discourse represents a serious misreading of what really happened”.¹²¹ French and others argue that this misreading of history has spread to British Army doctrine. It is surprising that no cross-government theory of counter-insurgency was produced during the 1950s to 1970s but it would not be completely correct that the “the development of general doctrine had to wait until the 1990s”.¹²² This thesis recognises that doctrine was only a guide but the British military did produce and revised several manuals on counter-insurgency during the period 1959-77. The volume on Counter Revolutionary Operations was particularly relevant to fighting the Marxist inspired PFLOAG in Oman.¹²³ By making use of such material, this thesis can directly contribute to the historical debate on British counter-insurgency, using doctrine manuals to examine how propaganda and psychological operations were or were not able to adapt to the particular character of a campaign.¹²⁴ Engaging with this debate, necessitates looking at the history of the British Armed Forces during a period of considerable change, including several major defence reviews.¹²⁵ Karl Hack and others also identify how “contemporary moral attitudes can seep into historical scholarship”, in this case in relation to the use of violence itself.¹²⁶ The recent release of British government documents, particularly those of the IRD, are to be welcomed as they allow interpretations that look beyond these accounts and themes. This thesis will pursue a study that avoids the pitfalls of contemporary attitudes and judgements, instead adding to the historiography by interpreting Britain’s ways and means in Southern Arabia between 1959 to 1977 from a perspective that does not simply look for “spectacular examples of atrocities”.¹²⁷ Instead it will engage with the study of why and how the British and colonial authorities used a range of measures (coercive and non-coercive) to achieve their objectives.

¹²¹ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945-1967* p 5.

¹²² Alexander Alderson, “Britain” in Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (Eds), *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, Operations and Challenges* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) p 28.

¹²³ TNA, WO 279/649 Land Operations Volume III – Counter Revolutionary Operations Part 1 – Principles and General Aspects, 29 August 1969.

¹²⁴ Bennet H, “The reluctant pupil? Britain’s army and learning in counter-insurgency”, *Royal United Services Institute*, 11 October 2009: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/reluctant-pupil-britain%E2%80%99s-army-and-learning-counter-insurgency>, accessed 8 Apr 2020.

¹²⁵ French, *Army, Empire & Cold War* and Hew Strachan (Ed), *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the 20th Century* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹²⁶ Hack, “Everyone Lived in Fear” and Mockaitis “The Minimum Force Debate” p 765. For an alternate view see Paul Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’? British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32:3 (2009).

¹²⁷ Mathew Hughes, “Introduction: British Ways of Counter-Insurgency”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:4-5 (2012) p 585.

Chapter Structure

By considering how British political warfare was applied over two chronological campaigns and with fresh insights available from IRD files and other sources, this thesis can explain how British Government thinking about political warfare evolved. This study has the opportunity to go beyond previous works, exploring how political warfare was applied in Southern Arabia through the DFP, its successors and the IRD into the 1970s.¹²⁸ The argument is outlined in six chapters, which will contextualise historical events in order to explain the impact of political warfare. By taking this approach, links will be made between what was happening in the campaigns and why political warfare effected or was affected by events. This will help to develop the argument that although the use of political warfare was part of British strategy, its effectiveness could be undone by other factors. Political warfare was therefore not a solution to every problem facing Britain in the Middle East between 1959-77.

First, this introduction sets out the thesis' argument, defines key terms and reviews the existing literature, therein placing the thesis in the wider historiography. Second, the origins of Britain's post war political warfare apparatus will be explained. This will focus on demonstrating why and how the structures from the Second World War were adapted for the Cold War and examine them in relation to the two case studies. Third, Britain's objectives in the Middle East from 1945 to 1959 will be explored, in order to understand the assumptions drawn by the Government about its place in the region. The challenges and threats that Britain faced can then be analysed, as it attempted to balance worldwide commitments in relation to the Cold War. Changes in Britain's standing in the Middle East will be investigated, particularly the effects of the Suez crisis on limiting Britain's ways of affecting events and achieving its objectives.

Fourth, having looked at the broader Middle East, why and how Britain employed political warfare as the way to secure its interests in South Arabia between 1959 and 1967 will be explained. Aden was viewed as a strategic base, to be used well into the 1970s, even during a period of reappraisal of Britain's global interests. Britain's employment of political warfare to secure this hub from the external and internal threats of Arab nationalism will be explored through the emergence of opposition groups in Aden itself, the Yemen Civil War

¹²⁸ Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 250.

and the intensification of the insurgency against the Federation. This allows for a systematic analysis, making use of new material. The inclusion of this material matters because it shows how black propaganda was actually used to a greater extent than was previously thought. This changes the historical understanding, making it possible to evaluate what the Government actually did and meaning that a more comprehensive evaluation of its effectiveness can be made. Fifth, how the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967 changed the conditions for the Omani insurgents, by creating a safe haven for them in South Yemen, will be investigated. This will include contextualising British interests in Oman, along with developments in the methods of political warfare. How Britain pursued its interests in light of the apparent withdrawal from the region, whilst utilising a strategy that successfully defeated the Dhofar insurgency will be explained. The use of lectures and interviews with a participant offers a unique perspective. This matters because when combined with IRD files, the extent of the political warfare component of the campaign can be more fully explored, which challenges the evidence presented in some memoirs by SAS personnel. Sixth, the argument that success or failure was not solely due to an inherent weakness of the ways and means employed but exacerbated by the political choices will be assessed. This will allow conclusions to be drawn on Britain's use of political warfare in Southern Arabia between 1959-1977 and beyond.

The research framework for this study uses three major themes: Britain in the Cold War, Britain in the Middle East and British decolonisation and counter-insurgency. Therefore, this thesis will consider the objectives Britain wanted to achieve in Southern Arabia, how they changed during the period 1959 to 1977 and the ways and means that Britain used to achieve its ends during the two case studies in Southern Arabia. New sources have not been viewed in isolation but consider the historiography of the period, the debates these events raise and the review of the existing literature, as described above. Having identified the new sources, the central question of the thesis was developed and the case studies identified. The structure of the thesis in a chronological way supports the exploitation of all sources in a logical manner i.e. as they occurred. This approach allows for the development of a good understanding of the period in general and the study in totality, the themes under investigation and in the end assess the relative importance of political warfare.

As would be expected, the National Archives at Kew has been a major source of material, holding as it does papers of the major government departments. Specific classes of

records used can be found in the bibliography. Additionally, the papers of the India Office, from when it administered Aden, have been consulted from the British Library.¹²⁹ The BBC archive at Caversham has also been consulted, not only for contemporaneous reporting but also as the BBC was a channel for particular IRD propaganda material. It was, in fact, at times a significant means of disseminating material, designed to enhance Britain's image and support political warfare activities.¹³⁰ The archives of the Military Intelligence Museum provided a number of unique psychological warfare manuals and other material produced by the DFP. As well as these archives, the libraries and collections of a number of Oxbridge colleges offer unique materials. These include the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, the Bodleian Library which has the papers of the former High Commissioner in Aden (Sir Kennedy Trevaskis) and the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge which houses the British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), in which are interviews with former members of IRD.

To add to the archival material, this thesis also makes use of lectures and discussions with Mr John Ward, a former British serviceman involved in political warfare in Dhofar.¹³¹ Mr Ward led psychological operations as a prominent member of the British Army Training Team in Oman and later ran the Dhofar Information Office as a civilian contractor. John sadly passed away in 2016 but it is planned for his papers relating to Oman to be deposited with the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford. Whether from the BDOHP or interviews, this oral testimony from people directly involved in the campaigns, adds a new perspective to existing knowledge. The integration of this material with newly available sources has been vital in not only balancing them, in relation to potential bias and overall objectivity but also in supporting particular claims or events. The use of this oral evidence is still a useful and unique source for this thesis and along with the other material discussed, demonstrates an overall use of a broad range of sources.

Although the release of new archival records, particularly those from the migrated archive offer the opportunity for fresh evaluation there are almost certainly still gaps. This results from the more obvious retention of some organisations files, such as the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), to

¹²⁹ The British Library also holds a large number of propaganda posters, leaflets and other similar materials. An exhibition in 2013 showcased this material.

¹³⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/31 Annex A to JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations, British and Russian Methods of Disseminating Propaganda, 1 December 1947.

¹³¹ Ethical approval was granted for interviews under KCL reference number MR/16/17-39.

not all Government records reaching The National Archives. Gaps in archival records cannot simply be put down to deliberate destruction of possibly sensitive material but also to the loss, misfiling and reduction in paper records. One example is a reference in a DFP file to an Army Information Team (AIT) report from South Arabia between Summer 1965 and September 1967. The AIT was noted as “travelling vast distances – sometimes on horseback” a technique not mentioned in other documents.¹³² Whilst the example is very specific, the lack of the full report makes it difficult to fully assess the impact of the AIT to political warfare in South Arabia. In another case, it could have been assumed that having coordinated covert action in Yemen, the Joint Action Committee would provide a similar function during the campaign in Oman. The lack of any reference to such activity does suggest that there may yet be further material on aspects of Government coordination in Southern Arabia. It is unlikely that such specific information would alter the conclusions of this thesis.

¹³² The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

Chapter One – Organisation and Evolution of British Political Warfare and Counter-Subversion, 1945-59

This Chapter will examine the origins of the organisations that conducted political warfare and counter-subversion during the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar. A chronological analysis of the period 1945 to 1959 will demonstrate that the British Government chose to use political warfare to try and achieve its objectives, necessitating a reconstitution or reorganisation of the structures and organisations for it. The British experience of political warfare in the Second World War, its large-scale re-creation during the early Cold War, and its development during the campaigns of decolonisation showed that when different elements were synchronised, they could be greater than the sum of their parts. Although this was a period of intense organisational and bureaucratic transformation, conflict between government departments over fundamental issues such as decolonisation, hindered better coordination.¹³³ Using new material, the covert aspects of political warfare, their blending with overt elements, and the overall relationship to wider strategy can be interpreted anew.¹³⁴ Propaganda, for example was found to be potentially more effective if it was integrated with military, economic and diplomatic activities.¹³⁵ Only by understanding why and how these different elements were formed and by analysing their development before Aden and Dhofar, can an accurate review of later activities be made. This chapter will demonstrate how the tradition of using options between diplomacy and open warfare continued after the end of the Second World War and were further developed for the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar.

Origins

Britain had a long history of utilising political warfare before the Cold War. A 1950s military doctrine handbook identifies examples from the English Civil War and the American War of Independence.¹³⁶ The manipulation of information, local diplomacy favouring one faction over another and economic blockade were all tried and tested weapons in Britain's arsenal. Advances in technology during the twentieth century, like radio broadcast and television only increased the potential reach of political warfare. As Britain's power waned

¹³³Cormac, "The Pinprick Approach" p 8, Mockaitis, "The Minimum Force Debate" p 771 and Davey, "Conflicting Worldviews, Mutual Incomprehension" p 542.

¹³⁴ Zamir, *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East* p 14-15.

¹³⁵ Lowell H Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin: US and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p 179-80.

¹³⁶ Isaac, *Psychological Warfare Handbook* p 8.

in relation to the two Cold War superpowers, or the use of military forces was too dangerous because of the fear of escalation, political warfare came to be seen as a way of using Britain's remaining influence to recast its position.¹³⁷ The period 1959-64 saw much debate within government as to how this power and influence could be maintained and a number of studies were set up to try and "keep pace with a rapidly changing post war world".¹³⁸ How far this balancing act could continue to be effective will be explored in subsequent chapters. In the cases of Aden and Dhofar where a positive model of British or British supported rule was proclaimed, the opposing causes of Marxism and Arab nationalism could be challenged or subverted, without resorting to large scale military intervention. Britain would therefore, attempt to balance her limited military resources with the increasing cost of commitments and the changing political landscape that meant escalation to all-out war had to be prevented.¹³⁹

The essential nature of war was described by the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz in his nineteenth century treatise, *On War*.¹⁴⁰ It remained relevant to military activities in the twentieth century because Clausewitz persuasively argued that no matter who the belligerents were, conflicts would always be destructive, involving a contest of wills and where adversaries struggle to win.¹⁴¹ This is important for this study because Clausewitz identified the inherently political nature of warfare. Famously he identified "that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means".¹⁴² Political decisions obviously shape conflicts and as such military power should be aligned with political objectives to be most effective. During the 1950s, 60s and 70s Britain wanted to avoid large scale conflict and so rationalised that using overt violence to compel an adversary was not the most effective way to succeed. Physical violence to destroy a rebellion could take significant time and resources, and Britain did not have the capacity to deploy endless numbers of troops to quash an insurgency over a long period of time. Military means were better expended through synchronised efforts that used a range of measures to create the conditions for

¹³⁷ How much this was a recasting and how much this period was a turning point is still debated. See for example, Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez* p 26-29 and Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War 1945-91* p 174.

¹³⁸ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez* p 26-29.

¹³⁹ TNA, PREM 11/49, COS (52) Defence Policy and Global Strategy Report by the Chiefs of Staff, 9 July 1952 p 9-11 and TNA, CAB 129/100 Future Policy Study 1960-70 General Conclusions, 29 February 1960 p 46-47.

¹⁴⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin Books, 1982).

¹⁴¹ UK MOD, *Army Field Manual Land Operations* (Warminster: Ministry of Defence, 2017) p 1-2.

¹⁴² Clausewitz, *On War* p 119.

success.¹⁴³ The aim of such an approach was to use persuasion or influence of a target audience and in doing so create the conditions for greater stability through enhanced government control.¹⁴⁴ This outcome is different from the decisive destruction of a conventional conflict, as political warfare aims not just to explain actions but to challenge perceptions. Simply attacking an adversary in this politicised context was unlikely to achieve any objective beyond destruction, unless the activity was coordinated with others to achieve a result greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁴⁵ The use of violence in this manner, as a part of the political process, was an understood element of Western warfare meaning that military action was seen as a means to end not an end in itself. To be effective in counter-insurgency, political warfare needed to be wielded by the British government in a fashion that targeted the correct audiences for different types of activities – lethal or non-lethal.

Although arguably ancient in design, the application of organised, modern, political warfare by the British started, with varying success, during the First World War. Government organisations were set up to propagate messages, pursue economic warfare, and generally subvert the German war effort. Capabilities were not as coordinated as would be the case later, but rather developed through trial and error. For one political warfare element, the conduct of propaganda, several organisations were created and by 1918 a Ministry of Information was operating.¹⁴⁶ The use of subversive means to pursue an ‘indirect approach’ to warfare, was not completely forgotten with the Great War’s end and preparations were made for similar organisations in the event of future conflict. During the inter-war period Britain was a pioneer of using official bodies to project British interests, for example during the 1920s the Empire Marketing Board, set up by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, used printed media campaigns to promote intra-imperial trading.¹⁴⁷ In 1934 the Foreign Office (FO) created the British Committee for Overseas Relations to

¹⁴³ Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European Empires and the Use of War* (London: Hurst & Co, 2017) p 108-109.

¹⁴⁴ Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy* p 17.

¹⁴⁵ Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971) p 72.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, INF 4/1B History of MI7(b) (March 1916 – December 1918) see also, Peter M Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: War Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Nuclear Age* (Wellingborough: Thorsons Publishing Group, 1990) and David Welch (Ed), *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to Wikileaks* (London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Examples of the posters were displayed at an exhibition titled “Propaganda: Power and Persuasion” at the British Library in 2013. Philip M Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Karl Hack, “Selling Empire: The Empire Marketing Board”, <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/world-history/selling-empire-the-empire-marketing-board> accessed on 23 December 2016.

promote British culture, particularly education, and fight the spread of fascism. By 1936 the title had been shortened to simply the British Council. The offensive against “the totalitarian use of propaganda, powerfully and deliberately directed against British interests abroad”, was also a form of moral rearmament when war in Europe once again loomed.¹⁴⁸

In the Second World War, Britain faced an existential threat, and used every method at its disposal for defence. In the short term the expansion of organisations set up in the late 1930s was one manifestation of this. The establishment of a new Ministry of Information, the expansion of the FO’s grey and black propaganda organisation, Electra House, and the renewed interest in subversion as part of wider economic warfare by both the War Office and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) are all examples of this. High powered radio broadcasts extended the physical reach of propaganda, the ability to deceive was enhanced with the sophisticated exploitation of double agents, and the insight provided by signals intelligence assisted in understanding how these other means were being received. Further, an organised blockade was managed through the Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW) to disrupt the Axis countries’ economies by indirect measures such as lowering morale, or by directly effecting industry and food supply. Formed in September 1939 but designed during the inter-war period MEW was a part of the determined ‘indirect’ approach by all means possible to reduce the military contribution to the war.¹⁴⁹ By the end of the war Britain had established layered coordination and execution capabilities that made use of all the levers available for planning and prosecuting political warfare. The covert and overt methods of political warfare had been coordinated as never before, an important development in creating the optimal conditions for success.

At the war’s end, there was no clear need to retain the machinery of political warfare. Although potentially useful, wartime capabilities were costly and, in some quarters, were thought to be unnecessary in a world without a clear adversary.¹⁵⁰ By 1946 many of the strategic mechanisms of coordination, control and in some cases the very organisations themselves had been dismantled. Some elements did survive in a reduced state or were briefly disbanded only to re-emerge in order to keep a particular capability alive. In the specific case of strategic deception, the capability was felt to be of such importance that it

¹⁴⁸ Philip M Taylor, “British Official Attitudes to Propaganda Abroad, 1918-39”, in Nicholas Pronay and DW Spring (Ed), *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982) p 39.

¹⁴⁹ Nechama Janet Cohen Cox, *The Ministry of Economic Warfare and Britain’s Conduct of Economic Warfare, 1939-1945* (Thesis for Doctor Philosophy: King’s College London, 2001).

¹⁵⁰ Philip M Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p 236.

was kept alive.¹⁵¹ Other capabilities like special operations were also quietly maintained, although on a reduced basis.¹⁵² Significantly, the national wartime effort meant that there were a relatively large number of people with experience of either controlling, participating in or at least understanding political warfare. Those who continued in the world of politics, the military, the media or similar, maintained a collective memory of the bureaucracy that had been created and used to much success.¹⁵³ Some of these people, like Colonel Noel Wild of the Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP), would continue in post several decades after the end of the war - including during the later campaigns in Aden and Dhofar.¹⁵⁴

The immediate post war Labour Government was faced with difficult decisions in political and economic matters. Labour had campaigned and won the election in order to enact a series of extensive social changes to the fabric of Britain.¹⁵⁵ These domestic measures were expensive and needed to be balanced against problems such as funding the building of British nuclear weapons and maintaining a global empire. International events had an unfortunate habit of impacting on domestic and economic considerations, a state of affairs that would continue all the way to the 1960s and 70s. Imperial possessions represented assets for Britain but also liabilities. In some cases, managed decolonisation, although often fraught with difficulty (e.g. partition of British India) was achievable in line with the policy of the Government and led by the Prime Minister.¹⁵⁶ In other places, such as Malaya, national interests were at stake and the Attlee government acted to secure British foreign and economic interests. In the case of Malaya control of the export of rubber and tin from the colony secured much needed revenue for the British economy. The immediate post war period was described by the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the time, Christopher Mayhew, as a “nightmare”, due to the tempo, stress, and enormity of the work.¹⁵⁷ The crisis brewing over the wartime garrisoning of Northern Iran by the Red Army was one such nightmare. The increasing belligerence of the Soviet Union, over

¹⁵¹ Richard Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain 1945-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p 229.

¹⁵² Richard Aldrich, “Unquiet in Death: the post War Survival of the ‘Special Operations Executive’, 1945-51” in A Gorst and WS Lucas (Ed), *Politics and the Limits of Policy* (London: Pinter, 1991) and Philip HJ Davies, “From Special Operations to Special Political Action: the ‘Rump SOE’ and SIS Post-War Covert Action Capability 1945-1977”, *Intelligence and National Security*, 15:3 (2000).

¹⁵³ TNA, DEFE 28/103 Operation HOUSE PARTY. This file records attempts by former members of the Second World War strategic deception organisations and the security and intelligence agencies, to meet in private and discuss the ongoing utility of their work.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 48/69 History of United Kingdom Deception Organisation A1-2.

¹⁵⁵ Bew, *Citizen Clem* p 360.

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas Owen, “Attlee governments: The end of empire 1945–51” *Contemporary British History*, 3:4 (1990) p 12-16.

¹⁵⁷ Christopher Mayhew, *Time to Explain: An Autobiography* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1987) p 91-97.

these troops and the lack of British influence with the USA could not be ignored but nor could it be acted on without delicate diplomatic, military and economic consideration.¹⁵⁸ It was increasingly obvious that hopes of continuing the wartime partnerships with the USSR and to a certain extent the USA were not going to be possible. Whilst elements of the Labour party debated whether Britain could act as a 'third force' between the US and USSR, Britain's position as an independent great power was increasingly under strain.¹⁵⁹

During 1946 and 1947, Clement Attlee not only had to deal with the international dimension of his Government's policies, but also a potential political split through the 'Keep Left' group of Labour MPs, who wanted to see a Socialist Britain and Europe acting independently of both the US and the USSR.¹⁶⁰ British partnership with an increasingly inwards facing United States was by no means as certain as it might later have appeared. British possession of an overseas empire still rankled with many in the US and the wartime allies had quickly become dislocated over foreign affairs; a situation which would create potential difficulties with regard to Anglo-US cooperation in the Middle East. Further, it was not just the Labour Party that was split over the decision of how best to conduct British foreign affairs. The Armed Forces Chiefs of Staff, the FO and the Colonial Office (CO) also all differed in their prioritisation of actions to be undertaken, in relation to national interests – a position which would continue, particularly in relation to the later campaign in Aden.¹⁶¹

The expansionist policies of the USSR in Eastern and Central Europe, increasingly portrayed through Soviet political warfare, galvanised the different departments. The FO's Cultural Relations Department (CRD) and the British Council were already identifying Soviet subversion and attempts were being made to fight it, such as the overt use of cultural propaganda to counter Communist influence of youth movements.¹⁶² Discussions were also taking place on the use of special operations to halt the spread of Communism in the Commonwealth and Western Europe.¹⁶³ In April 1946 the FO created the Russia

¹⁵⁸ Michael S Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee Volume 1: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2016) p 242.

¹⁵⁹ Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), *IRD Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946-48* Historian, IRD No. 9 August 1995 p 2.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, FO 371/66371 Anglo-Soviet Relations: Proposed Revision of Anglo-Soviet Treaty 1947.

¹⁶¹ Mawby, "The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism" p 170.

¹⁶² Richard Aldrich, "Putting Culture into the Cold War: the Cultural Relations Department (CRD) and British Covert Information Warfare", *Intelligence and National Security*, 18:2 (2003) p 110.

¹⁶³ TNA, DEFE 28/31 JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) 1st December 1947 Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations and TNA, CAB 81/94 JIC/1440/46 Anti-British Subversion Activities – Middle East 22 October 1946 and TNA, FO 1093/347 JIC/406/46 SOE Operational Planning, 1 April 1946.

Committee to investigate the issue. The Russia Committee was as an early attempt to re-establish the kind of coordinating body that had existed during the Second World War. The Committee was set up to study recent Soviet actions and was to play a major role in shaping British policy towards the USSR in the very earliest days of the Cold War.¹⁶⁴ Committees such as the Counter Subversion Committee and Joint Action Committee would be equally important in shaping and directing political warfare in the Middle East in the 1960s.¹⁶⁵ It was however, no foregone conclusion that a counter Soviet political warfare campaign would be launched in the late 1940s. The initial appreciation of what such a campaign would look like was first presented to the Russia Committee in May 1946 and was almost completely rejected. It was not until 1948 that the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, agreed to the establishment of a clandestine propaganda instrument within the FO – the Information Research Department (IRD) – to counter Soviet subversion and political warfare.¹⁶⁶

The events of the late 1940s reinvigorated political warfare as an element of strategy, as it had been during the Second World War. In relation to the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar this is important for a number of reasons. Faced with significant financial and political challenges, successive post war governments came to rebuild political warfare capabilities because they were the means by which Britain could preserve her global standing, pursue strategic interests and national objectives.¹⁶⁷ Whilst still maintaining a global empire, political warfare was a way that Britain could constrain the use of force, preventing escalation in an East-West nuclear contest but also in the case of Aden and Dhofar, of escalation to a regional conflict.¹⁶⁸ The emergence and engagement in fighting a Cold War against the USSR, set the strategic context for the next four decades.¹⁶⁹ Britain's international position would be as the principal ally to the United States, sharing the same outlook broadly as the US on the dangers of escalating the Cold War to a point where it became hot. Political warfare could support this shared interest and therefore, activities

¹⁶⁴ TNA, FO 371/54885 The Terms of the Russia Committee, 12 April 1946.

¹⁶⁵ Cormac, "Coordinating Covert Action" p 692-717.

¹⁶⁶ TNA, FO 1110/9 GEN 231/1 Anti-Communist Publicity: Memo by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 30 April 1948 and FO 1110/383 Reference on the Information Research Department for the Foreign Office Order Book, 22 March 1951. See also Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53* p 71-76.

¹⁶⁷ WS Lucas and CJ Morris, "A Very British Crusade: the Information Research Department and the Beginning of the Cold War", Richard Aldrich (Ed), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 1992) p 86.

¹⁶⁸ Cormac, "The Pinprick Approach" p 14, For the threat to escalation in the wider Middle East see Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 23 and specific to South Arabia Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p xviii and in Dhofar DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 148.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, FO 1093/375 Covert Propaganda, JP(47)118 Special Operations, 17 December 1947.

such as propaganda, economic warfare and covert action were linked to the approach of both Britain and the US in pursuing the Cold War. In the context of the Middle East, Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab nationalism was a case in point. His decision to move closer to the Soviet sphere for military aid after 1955 presented a combined threat to Anglo-American interests and therefore, linked to the security of the region in the context of the wider Cold War.¹⁷⁰

What was evident from the very beginning of attempts to coordinate British political warfare and counter-subversion policy, was the distinct difference of opinion between the major government departments over why such a policy was necessary and how it was to be achieved. The 'bullish' attitude of the Chiefs of Staff, was in direct contradiction to the long-term views of the FO, which in turn disagreed with the CO, often the body working with the target audience of political warfare and counter-subversion. This friction and the resulting lack of agreement would recur repeatedly, specifically during the campaign in Aden.¹⁷¹ The identification of a grand strategic objective to which all elements of political warfare could be harnessed was not consistent. In both Aden and Dhofar tactical considerations of broadcasting mediums demonstrated how technology could be an important mechanism for political warfare – but it could not make up for the divergent nature of government strategy at times. The descent into a Cold War set the context for much of Britain's approach to political warfare for the next forty years. It did not, however, automatically lead to the grand strategic equation of balancing ends, ways and means. The significant shifts in Britain's position to its commitment East of Suez during the mid-1960s offer appropriate examples of the issue. Britain's often reactive objectives, particularly during the Wilson Government, hampered the coordination of the ways and means of political warfare. Ultimately, the ever-changing end goal severely limited anything that could be achieved by the ways and means of political warfare alone.

Organs of an Uncoordinated Approach

The decision to decommission the Ministry of Information in 1945 divided much of the responsibility for information policy across various government departments, although the

¹⁷⁰ TNA, CAB 158/30 JIC Likely Developments in Arabian Peninsula, 4 December 1957. Further the 1962 deployment of Egyptian troops into the Yemen was facilitated by Soviet aircrew. See Jesse Ferris, "Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963", *The Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:4 (2008).

¹⁷¹ Cormac, Goodman & Holman, "A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action" p 17.

majority of overseas government propaganda machinery fell under FO control.¹⁷² A Central Office of Information (COI) was created that served as the hub for British government publicity. This replicated some of the functions of the Ministry of Information.¹⁷³ It provided technical support, but not coordination, across government. This is important because of the later relationship between the COI's London Press Service (LPS) and one of the primary executive organisations of political warfare, the IRD.¹⁷⁴ The LPS, as one of the key overt projectors of Britain overseas, could act as a useful channel for IRD material.¹⁷⁵ IRD was responsible for anti-Communist propaganda, whilst "the IPD [Information Policy Department] [was] for 'positive' propaganda about the British way of life".¹⁷⁶ As the FO utilised its Information Policy Department (IPD) as the coordinator of overseas information services through Information Officers in the Embassies, the IRD relationship with CIO created the conditions for a closer interdepartmental relationship between IRD and IPD.¹⁷⁷ The IPD Information Officers became a key conduit for IRD, which did not have large numbers of staff based abroad.¹⁷⁸ The presence of a Regional Information Office (RIO) in Beirut, which had by 1955 increasing become "a field branch of Information Research Department" would support the informational aspects of political warfare in both Aden and Dhofar.¹⁷⁹

Although the IPD coordinated overseas propaganda, in the colonies the CO could call upon its own Information Department - COID. The interest in pursuing political warfare against anti-imperialist groups would bring the IRD and others into direct conflict with the CO – particularly in Southern Arabia. The CO as the department that had to actually administer British imperial possessions, was in some ways better placed to understand the local issues. Further during the 1960s, with decolonisation progressing the CO was attempting to transfer power to local entities and resisted attempts to impose central political warfare apparatus for counter-insurgency purposes.¹⁸⁰ The attempt to use the overt information architecture for counter-subversion purposes infuriated CO officials and frustrated their policies for decolonisation. In part this frustration was due to CO officials' personal perceptions that the Cabinet Office and the FO interfered in their business and

¹⁷² TNA, CAB 128/5 CM (45) 60th Meeting, 6 December 1945.

¹⁷³ Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin* p 48.

¹⁷⁴ Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53* p 84-85.

¹⁷⁵ Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 134-135.

¹⁷⁶ Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* p 30.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, FO 1110/715 London Press Service memo FC Stacey, 5 March 1954.

¹⁷⁸ Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 24.

¹⁷⁹ TNA, FO 1110/834 From Beirut to Foreign Office, 15 November 1955.

¹⁸⁰ Mawby, "The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism" p 179.

because they felt that other Whitehall departments were more focused on the Cold War than the colonies.¹⁸¹ It also reflected the different departmental focus of the CO and FO; the CO as a former Governor of Aden remarked, “functions only in the field and has no part in the central direction carried out from...Whitehall”.¹⁸² Covert approaches to political warfare circumvented the overt COID and could be problematic. This occurred when external factors, such as Communist influences, were focused on rather than nationalist or at least simply anti-imperialist ones.¹⁸³ Such approaches were used by political warfare organisations in South Arabia, potentially to a detrimental effect in communicating a clear British position to the local population in order to influence them.

As well as the projection of British interests through overt information services, the advantages of British arts, language, literature and learning could be publicised to gain influence. The study of the cultural Cold War has increased in the last decade and the use of the British Council to pursue cultural diplomacy has attracted interest.¹⁸⁴ The FO provided support to the British Council, through the Cultural Relations Department (CRD) and an appreciation of culture was therefore, understood to be important for both overt projection of Britain and covertly for creating sophisticated political warfare and counter-subversion material. This approach had its foundations in the inter-war period when the British Council was originally established.

The use of cultural propaganda had gained importance after 1935, promoting Britain, as it became apparent it might have to fight another war and as Philip Taylor has said “moral rearmament” when overt military preparations were not possible.¹⁸⁵ In some way therefore, Britain had experience that propaganda “with other forms of covert political and economic activity...worked most effectively”.¹⁸⁶ Already supporting rival organisations to those of the Soviet Union, when IRD was formed in 1948, the CRD was able to continue this in collaboration with IRD.¹⁸⁷ Looking back to the interwar period the CRD established that to counter Communist subversion, activities would need to be conducted on a global

¹⁸¹ TNA CO 1035/117 Memo Carstairs, 20 April 1956 and Davey, “Conflicting Worldviews, Mutual Incomprehension” p 542 and 547.

¹⁸² Johnston, *The View From Steamer Point* p 190 and Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965* p 32-25.

¹⁸³ Lucas and Morris, “A Very British Crusade” p 106.

¹⁸⁴ JM Lee “British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 9:1 (1998) p 112 and James Vaughan, “A Certain Idea of Britain’: British Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1945-57”, *Contemporary British History* 19:2 (2005) p 152.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* p76-78.

¹⁸⁶ Cormac, “The Pinprick Approach” p 17.

¹⁸⁷ Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin* p 49.

scale. Although CRD recognised that to achieve effective results, the use of (covert) 'front' organisations would be necessary, the FO invested more financial and personnel resources into the IRD than CRD.¹⁸⁸ Culture was seen as a method of disseminating wider political warfare campaigns and was a recognised activity of the Cold War by the mid-1950s but the balance of investment was made in the covert organisations such as IRD.¹⁸⁹ The overt apparatus using the COI, was simply a provider to customers across Whitehall. As with other areas of government information organisation, such as the Information Officers in Embassies, the covert approach carried more weight.¹⁹⁰ More generally cultural understanding in relation to political warfare operations in both Aden and Dhofar, did enhance the potential for success, with the inclusion of radio programming specific to women and children, and the provision of medical and veterinary care to the local population being broadly positive and well received by the local population.¹⁹¹ These cultural aspects were designed to influence hearts and minds, a broader part of the counter-insurgency campaign strategy.

In Southern Arabia, a lack of cultural appreciation by the British affected officials' views of the local population. Although not official policy, a persistent tendency for British officialdom to romanticise Arabs, epitomised by the term 'orientalism', has been argued to have influenced the decision to focus on a covert campaign of political warfare in the Middle East.¹⁹² The term is seen as affecting British officials in their understanding of and attitudes towards Arabs. Specifically, this mindset has been argued to have shaped the character of political warfare and counter-subversion in Aden.¹⁹³ There are however, examples of British administrator's, such as Harold Ingrams (a political officer in Aden in the 1930s), who had very clear understanding of the tribal structure and nature of the local population.¹⁹⁴ Yet potential frictions remained, as Charles Johnston identified when he wrote of the Colonial Service, "that the consequential loss of contact with London and with

¹⁸⁸ Aldrich, "Putting Culture into the Cold War" p 110-111 and Lee "British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War" p 114.

¹⁸⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/31 Annex A to JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations, British and Russian Methods of Disseminating Propaganda, 1 December 1947.

¹⁹⁰ TNA, CAB 130/72 Ad Hoc Committee on Government Information Services quoted in Lee 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War' p 118.

¹⁹¹ For an interesting account of the use of vets in Dhofar to support the campaign see, Andrew Higgins, *With the SAS and Other Animals: A Vet's Experiences During the Dhofar War 1974* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword 2015).

¹⁹² See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) or specifically on British attitudes Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957*.

¹⁹³ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MSS British Empire s 546 Box 2 (B) File 7, Papers of Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, diary entry for 17 August 1963.

¹⁹⁴ Hinchcliffe, Ducker & Halt, *Without Glory in Arabia* p 119.

the outside world as a whole makes members of the service less capable of seeing those interests as they really are".¹⁹⁵ Johnston also identified that tension existed between the colonial administration and Whitehall, whose interest was keeping financial costs to a minimum.

Cooperation using British cultural institutions was also possible outside of government and could be useful in positively influencing a local populations mindset towards Britain. In this way, the BBC was potentially a useful tool for political warfare. The post-war government relationship with the BBC was set out in a White Paper of July 1946. In this and later papers the emphasis was on the truth of the material broadcast and the enduring view of the BBC itself, that it must be impartial and objective.¹⁹⁶ It was therefore, seen as an asset for the nation.¹⁹⁷ The BBC Arabic Service broadcast from 1938 and was acknowledged as a part of British propaganda methods.¹⁹⁸ The tensions in maintaining the desirable relationship between broadcaster and the government, reflecting British interests, and yet remaining impartial were exposed during the Suez Crisis.¹⁹⁹ Trying to balance conflicting positions put pressure on a supposedly independent, impartial, and open institution that would persist with attempts to coordinate overt and covert political warfare and counter-subversion during campaigns in Southern Arabia in the 1960s. In his work on the media and the Suez Crisis, Tony Shaw argues that the BBC was treading an extremely fine line between being objective and supporting the government line, under "a most severe test".²⁰⁰ John Jenks concludes that even before Suez, the Corporation was "favouring the government interest over the listeners and viewers".²⁰¹ When Harold Wilson's Government came to power in 1964, it was at a time of social as well as political change. This has been documented recently by a number of writers and historians producing works dealing with the changes to the social fabric of Britain during this period.²⁰² According to JB Kelly these changing attitudes, produced a "shallowly cynical and infinitely knowing intellectual atmosphere... [that saw South Arabia's federal rulers] traditional, long

¹⁹⁵ Johnston, *The View From Steamer Point* p 189-191. See also Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 42-44.

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* p 236.

¹⁹⁷ Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin* p 72.

¹⁹⁸ TNA, DEFE 28/31 Annex A to JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations, British and Russian Methods of Disseminating Propaganda, 1 December 1947.

¹⁹⁹ Peter Partner, *Arab Voices: The BBC Arabic Service 1938-1988* (London: BBC Book, 1988).

²⁰⁰ Tony Shaw, *Eden Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion During the Suez Crisis* (London: IB Tauris, 2009) p 150.

²⁰¹ Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* p 51.

²⁰² Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties 1964-1970* (London: Abacus, 2009) and Christopher Bray, *1965: The Year Modern Britain was Born* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

established or revered...deemed fit only for mockery, contumely or relegation to oblivion” and was a trait that was carried on by “the responsible organs of the press”.²⁰³ More recently Matthew Hughes has written how “mass media coverage from the 1960s...has disseminated the violence of counter-insurgency to a post-imperial world inflected by liberal doubt”.²⁰⁴ Therefore, at the time of Aden and Dhofar, the government would find it much more difficult to cooperate with organisations like the BBC. If cooperation over broadcasting could be difficult, the utility of the BBC Monitoring Service for political warfare was perhaps not so contentious and studying BBC Monitoring is useful in understanding how overt and covert means of political warfare could be blended.²⁰⁵ The BBC was not just a conduit for government material, but also though the Monitoring Service was a provider of information to the IRD and other government departments.²⁰⁶

As well as the development of overt tools to counter Communist subversion, there were also important developments in Britain’s covert capabilities. Particularly in the case of both Aden and Dhofar, secrecy was an important method of prosecuting political warfare in itself. This can be seen in the increasing use of un-attributable propaganda in Aden under Operation Rancour in the 1960s, and the sponsoring of proxy forces during Operation Dhib in Dhofar in the 1970s.²⁰⁷ Why these particular means of covert levers came about is, therefore, important to understanding their use as a way of political warfare in Aden and Dhofar.²⁰⁸ In considering this it is useful not to think of political warfare and counter-subversion in terms of exclusively either a covert or overt entity, such operations instead utilising both approaches. By the mid-1950s, IRD’s Middle East officer liaised with the COI, IPD, other FO departments (including the CRD), the CO, the MOD, and the BBC.²⁰⁹ The recent release of new sources on covert means of political warfare and counter-subversion, assists in understanding this blend and they are therefore, important for this study because they can refresh the debate on events in Southern Arabia in the 1960s and 70s.

²⁰³ Kelly *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 44.

²⁰⁴ Hughes, “Introduction: British ways of counter-insurgency” p 587.

²⁰⁵ See Gary Rawnsley, “Overt and Covert: The Voice of Britain and Black Radio Broadcasts in the Suez Crisis, 1956”, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11:3 (1996) p 498.

²⁰⁶ Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 36.

²⁰⁷ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965* p 97-98 and Hughes, “A Proxy War in Arabia” p 31-49.

²⁰⁸ Shaw, “Introduction: Britain and the Cultural Cold War” p 109. Mawby, “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism” p 171 and Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 186.

²⁰⁹ TNA, FO 953/1740 Propaganda in the Middle East – PR1041/50 Information Work in the Middle East.

Covert political warfare after the Second World War originated from the intelligence agencies (nominally under FO control), who pursued offensives against the USSR and enemies of the British Empire. Clement Attlee as Prime Minister was “not averse to using MI6 [SIS] in covert pursuit of foreign policies abroad” and not only in the now divided Europe, but in Britain’s colonies too.²¹⁰ As early as 1947 Attlee had authorised “the use of special operations to curb Jewish immigration to Palestine”.²¹¹ The following year remnants of Special Operations Executive (SOE), now the Directorate of War Planning in SIS, were directed to train, equip and dispatch sabotage and subversion agents into Albania. Albania in particular serves as an example of early Cold War political warfare and the issues involved with its use.²¹²

With the Soviet Union holding significant military forces in Central and Eastern Europe and its gaining of the atomic bomb in August 1949, the threat of warfare in Central Europe was perceived to be extremely real. In this context, the tools of “subversion, espionage, insurgency and propaganda became the weapons of choice”, to pursue activities against the Soviet Union, by all means possible less war.²¹³ Any attempt to remove the puppet Communist governments forcibly aligned under the Soviet Union appeared unrealistic and escalatory, but could subverting these regimes by supporting local resistance achieve the same result? Rory Cormac’s investigation of the Jebb Committee has highlighted the use of what he calls a ‘pinprick strategy’ to “gradually chip away at Soviet control by exploiting political weakness, targeting economic vulnerability, promoting dissension and spreading distrust”.²¹⁴ This method was calibrated to avoid sore spots “which, if pressed, could provoke a violent response from Moscow”.²¹⁵ Black propaganda operations had been considered as a way of subverting the Albanian government, but were thought to take too long; subversion and sabotage were considered more effective.²¹⁶ The Albanian operation was compromised from the very beginning by the long term penetration agent, Kim Philby, and in any case it showed the limitation of using covert action on its own.²¹⁷ The unfortunate agents captured by Albanian security forces had their equipment

²¹⁰ Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door* p 152.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Peter Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty: The Inside Story of Covert Operations from Ho Chi Minh to Osama Bin Laden* (London: Cassell & Co, 2001) see picture next to page 212 of ‘Equipment put on display by the MGB after it captured a group of SIS agents. This included weapons, currency and propaganda material.

²¹³ Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door* p 137.

²¹⁴ Cormac, “The Pinprick Approach” p 13.

²¹⁵ Hughes, *Harold Wilson’s Cold War* p 21.

²¹⁶ Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door* p 154.

²¹⁷ Keith Jeffery, *MI6 The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsburg, 2010) p 713.

photographed and were then executed.²¹⁸ Similar operations in the Baltic States, Belarus and the Ukraine also met with failure.

Having failed to remove any of Central and Eastern Europe from the Soviet sphere by special operations, the option of attempting to contain Soviet Communism gave much greater opportunities for the use of longer-term political warfare. As the Soviet Cominform increased its targeting of British interests, specifically in parts of the Middle East, the use of propaganda and wider political warfare as a means to influence foreign affairs, was revisited by the cabinet in 1948.²¹⁹ In the creation of the IRD, recently released papers confirm that, Sir Stewart Menzies then head of SIS, was aware of the decision to establish a covert propaganda organisation within the FO.²²⁰ The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was also a guiding hand in that it supported the Russia Committee's decision to create the IRD and that it would, "examine a counter-offensive against Soviet political warfare".²²¹ The JIC's guidance in supporting the Russia Committee is an example of its influence across Whitehall decision making. In the coordination of political warfare and counter-subversion this role would continue during the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar, through similar interdepartmental committees, such as the Joint Action Committee.²²²

In other areas falling short of open conflict, some useful counter offensive capabilities already existed and could continue to support wider strategy. In the area of economic warfare, specialist intelligence support had been investigating the Soviet Union since at least 1944. Such analysis of financial capability could assist with targeted economic warfare.²²³ This was a legacy of the MEW, the wartime government department responsible for the traditional British use of blockade but also the control of exports and imports by neutrals and allies through diplomatic methods and the physical destruction of the means of production through sabotage.²²⁴ Economic warfare was recognised as a key element to countering Soviet expansion in the early Cold War. Although economic warfare could not be practised on anything near such a systematic scale as during the Second World War, some activities such as the control of exports to Communist countries could

²¹⁸ Harclerode, *Fighting Dirty* picture next to page 212.

²¹⁹ TNA, FO 371/56887 Russia in the Middle East, 11 October 1946.

²²⁰ TNA, FO 1093/375 Letter from C (Stewart Menzies) to WG Hayter, 24 April 1948.

²²¹ FCO, *Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946-48* Historian, IRD No. 9 August 1995 p 20.

²²² Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965* p 111.

²²³ Peter Davies, "Geoffrey Vickers and Lessons from the Ministry of Economic Warfare for Cold War Defence Intelligence", *Intelligence and National Security* 31:6 (2016) p 8.

²²⁴ Cox, *The Ministry of Economic Warfare and Britain's Conduct of Economic Warfare, 1939-1945*.

still be used.²²⁵ Government departmental branches such as the Economic and Industrial Planning Staff of the FO and the Overseas Finance Division of the Treasury conducted negotiations on import and export controls and administered aspects of Britain's Marshall Plan aid and loan payments.²²⁶ The Marshall Plan demonstrates, at the macro level, how American and Western Europe could coordinate economic measures against the Soviet Union.

Economic warfare was also specifically considered as a part of wider and more offensive action against the Soviet Union.²²⁷ The pinprick strategy (previously mentioned) was designed in the wake of the failure to liberate Albania from the Soviet sphere and with the USSR now possessing atomic weapons, active support to resistance movements behind the Iron Curtain was considered to be too provocative.²²⁸ The newly formed Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee (PUSC), considered that where possible "every opportunity should be taken to weaken Russian control over the satellite States", although actions should fall short of escalation to either open resistance or risk a war.²²⁹ Economic warfare could support this strategy by using the existing economic intelligence organs to target weakness in Soviet satellites. These organs were the Joint Intelligence Bureau and the FO Economic Intelligence Department, the governance of which was coordinated by the AC(O) or Jebb Committee. Interestingly it appears that there was not a representative from the Treasury, although the Chancellor of the Exchequer was a member of the higher level Ministerial Committee on Communism – AC(M).²³⁰ Coordination was certainly improving as the AC(O) identified that economic action should be coordinated with propaganda.²³¹ Tactics now included 'selective buying', and another new multi-national body, the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls restricted what could be supplied to Communist countries.²³² However, Cormac's research suggests that by the mid-50s, the AC(O) had fallen out of favour as the committee considered covert means

²²⁵ Robert Mark Spaulding, "Trade, Aid and Economic Warfare" in Richard H Immerman and Petra Goedde (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p 405.

²²⁶ TNA, FO 1020/2700 Economic and Industrial Planning Staff Working Party 1944-45, FO 1032/1324 Economic and Industrial Planning Staff Reports and T 236 Overseas Finance Division.

²²⁷ See for example TNA, CAB 21/2591 Defence (Transition) Committee Economic Warfare Sub Committee - Clandestine Sabotage 5 October 1949 and TNA, DEFE 1/352 Censorship and Economic Warfare Revised List of Amendments to Government War Book 9 January 1952.

²²⁸ Cormac, "The Pinprick Approach" p 10.

²²⁹ TNA, FO 800/503 PUS (31) Final 28 July 1949 British Policy Towards Soviet Communism.

²³⁰ TNA, CAB 134/737-40 Official Committee on Communism (Home) Meetings 1951 and 1952.

²³¹ TNA, CAB 21/2750 AC(O) (50) 52 Proposed Activities Behind the Iron Curtain (Third Revision), November 1950.

²³² Alan P Dobson, "From Instrumental to Expressive: The Changing Goals of the US Cold War Strategic Embargo" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12:1 (2010) p 98-119.

only, rather than an integrated programme of overt and covert actions.²³³ Instead in 1956 the Official Committee on Counter Subversion in the Colonies was formed, which focused on “policy-led approaches, approaches that emphasised the communist threat, [and] had become central to British efforts in the colonies”.²³⁴ That activities remained focused on one specific threat (Communism) meant there was a lack of direction and the ways and means did not necessarily equal the strategic ends. A similar one-dimensional view, focused on covert propaganda was exhibited during the early stages of the Aden campaign and was a reason behind the establishment of the South Arabian Action Group to better synchronise and integrate all political warfare activities.²³⁵

Although lacking overall direction, economic warfare still had a part to play in later campaigns, such as those in Aden and Dhofar. At a basic level, bribery could provide a way of countering interests that threatened Britain. In Aden for example the process of bribing or rewarding newspaper editors and later other media elements was practised with the knowledge of the Governor.²³⁶ In Dhofar, employment of measures such as payments to surrendered enemy personnel, medical and veterinary improvements and general modernisation supported the wider strategy and were made possible by increasing revenue from Omani oil production. However, attempts to encourage socio-economic progress could also prove counter-productive. From the 1930s the CO had encouraged the formation of trade unions to give workers in the colonies similar rights to those in the UK and counter “insurrection”.²³⁷ In Aden these trade unions were quickly subverted as political instruments and from 1956 strikes were the vehicle for pursuing the objective of harnessing young radical migrants in the colony and furthering Arab nationalism.²³⁸ Strikes were coordinated with elections over the progress to federalisation in 1959, 1960 and 1962.²³⁹ The activities of the Aden Trade Union Congress (TUC) were seen in a sympathetic light by elements of the Labour Party in Britain and this coloured their assessment of the political party of the trade union, the People’s Socialist Party (PSP).²⁴⁰ When in government the Labour Party continued to court the PSP and the Aden TUC, in an ill-conceived attempt to move power from the tribal rulers to the urban population in

²³³ Cormac, “The Pinprick Approach” p 1.

²³⁴ Davey, “Conflicting Worldviews, Mutual Incomprehension” p 552.

²³⁵ Cormac, “Coordinating Covert Action” p 692-717.

²³⁶ TNA, DEFE 11/498 Trevaskis to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 May 1964.

²³⁷ Spencer Mawby, “Workers in the Vanguard: the 1960 industrial relations ordinance and the struggle for independence in Aden”, *Labour History* 57:1 (2016) p 35-36.

²³⁸ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 6-7 and p 13.

²³⁹ Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 26.

²⁴⁰ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 14.

Aden itself.²⁴¹ This attempt fundamentally misunderstood the aims and objectives of the radical Arab nationalists within the seemingly benign trade union movement. In its ideologically motivated attempt to find a different path than that of federalisation, the British Government from 1964 undid longer term socio-economic initiatives, with consequences for the wider campaign in Aden.

Renewed Anglo-American cooperation in the late 1940s assisted the coordination of political warfare instruments such as propaganda, special operations, and economic warfare.²⁴² Strategic deception was also used to support these other methods.²⁴³ Cooperation would continue with the establishment of various western alliances, in particular the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1949. NATO would establish an information service (NATIS) in August 1950. This organisation would be a compromise of ideas, like many entities in any alliance meaning differences in the British and American approaches to anti-communist propaganda would continue.²⁴⁴ In other areas, such as strategic deception NATO working groups were also established, such as the NATO Standing Group, which acknowledged the importance of deception planning in 1955.²⁴⁵ Committees such as the AC(O) also assisted with this multi-national approach but there remained at times, real differences in interests.²⁴⁶ The complex Anglo-American relationship in regard to interests in the Middle East was one such area where real differences manifested themselves.²⁴⁷

What was in genesis during the early Cold War period was in some ways, a return to what had been deconstructed at the end of the Second World War. The first attempts to coordinate political warfare activities saw the creation of various governmental committees, notably the AC(O) (the Jebb Committee) and the Ministerial Committee on

²⁴¹ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 22 and Mangold, *What the British Did* p 246.

²⁴² Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain 1945-1970* p 185-187 and Cormac, "The Pinprick Approach" p 25.

²⁴³ These operations are still classified but the file titles can be seen on the TNA database, for example TNA, DEFE 28/5 1950-1951 Russian amateurs (HAMS), DEFE 28/6 1952 Russian embassy in Addis Ababa or DEFE 28/24 1950-1955 GRACIOUS, DEFE 28/25 1952-1953 SHATTER. This retention may be because the files contain the identity or information that might identify human intelligence sources, access or techniques. Others may have a more salacious opinion.

²⁴⁴ Linda Rizzo, "A Difficult Compromise: British and American Plans for a Common Anti-Communist Propaganda Response in Western Europe", 1948-58, *Intelligence and National Security*, 26:2-3 (2011) p 339.

²⁴⁵ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Appendix 2 to Annex A to COS 48/69 NATO Deception Organisation.

²⁴⁶ Cormac, "The Pinprick Approach" p 19.

²⁴⁷ Vaughan, *The Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Arab Middle East* p 8-9.

Communism (Home), in 1949 and 1951 respectively.²⁴⁸ Importantly public opinion of 'Russia' shifted from that of seeing her as an ally, to perception of her as a threat.²⁴⁹ Although a new focus on fighting the Cold War was evident, persistent anti-colonial 'emergencies' could prove difficult to link to this wider strategy. Further, the use of political warfare as a force multiplier may have been recognised, but it lacked direction and coordination. Both of these issues would persist, affecting the later outcome of the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar.

Building the Political Warfare Infrastructure for Aden and Dhofar

Having described the environment of the late 1940 and 1950s within the narrative of the establishment of a British political warfare machinery, a more detailed examination of the two organisations that would prosecute political warfare in Aden and Dhofar will be undertaken. Into the late 1950s there remained considerable differences in the understanding between government departments as to what political warfare was and what it could deliver. Synchronisation, coordination and integration of the means available therefore, would be vital if a coherent way was to be developed to achieve Britain's ends. That much was obvious from previous experience and in the context of the wider Cold War and counter-insurgency campaigns. Over time experience was gained in conducting political warfare successfully achieving the objective. In the same manner relationships between individuals in different organisations also developed as they served together in the UK or abroad. Understanding why these relationships came about and how the organisations worked together (or did not) prior to the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar will set the conditions for the further examination of political warfare and counter-subversion in subsequent chapters.

The Information Research Department

Understanding the IRD and the particular role it played in applying political warfare is key to appreciating its later role in Aden and Dhofar. Much has been written about the founding of the IRD in 1948 to counter Communist subversion in the early Cold War, and

²⁴⁸ See Thomas Maguire, "Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and 'State Private Networks'" *Intelligence and National Security* 30:5 (2015).

²⁴⁹ Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53* p 5.

then to conduct covert propaganda more widely.²⁵⁰ The facts that an early member was the Soviet mole Guy Burgess, that George Orwell assisted the organisation, and that it was closed by David Owen in 1977 are all well known. It operated clandestinely and with other security and intelligence agencies. A former IRD secretary has said that when members of SIS entered the offices, all the staff had to face the wall presumably so as not to see the intelligence officers' faces.²⁵¹ This slightly odd story offers an example of how the Department was in some ways not a regular part of the FO.

Before the creation of the IRD, covert propaganda was largely the province of SIS, loosely based around ex SOE staff, and by the mid-1950s organised as the Special Political Action section.²⁵² The creation of IRD could complement what SIS was able to achieve on a deniable front. Assertions from former IRD members that the Department did not conduct black propaganda²⁵³ would support this interpretation of the separation of tasks between the two organisations in the late 1940s.²⁵⁴ Special Political Action (SPA) is useful to understand because it demonstrates an interest in clandestine activities to influence foreign policy, which continued all the way to the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar. The most comprehensive definition is:

“a form of covert action, [which] was created inside SIS in the 1950s with the remit to act ‘as the operational element in SIS for the conduct of all clandestine subversive operations in support of overseas objectives’.”²⁵⁵

This definition was written by the head of the DFP and is contained in an IRD minute from a committee dealing with psychological warfare.²⁵⁶ From 1956 to 1968 DFP was the hub of military psychological warfare/operations that would be a part of the wider governmental political warfare and counter-subversion plan (including the IRD) in Aden. In the case of Dhofar psychological operations were a principle of the campaign design from the very beginning and were coordinated with the Omani government, the RIO and IRD.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ See for example Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53*.

²⁵¹ Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* p 67.

²⁵² Philip HJ Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying* (London: Frank Cass, 2004) p 224.

²⁵³ British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Harold Herbert Tucker (transcript of interview by J Hutson), 19 April 1996.

²⁵⁴ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand* p 128-141 and Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door* p 170.

²⁵⁵ Cormac, Goodman & Holman, “A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action” p 17. See also Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying* p 227. See also Zamir, *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East* p14-15.

²⁵⁶ TNA, FO 1110/1102, Minute by JA [John] Drew to Major General RW McLeod, 9 May 1958.

²⁵⁷ TNA, DEFE 24/575, CSAF Assessment of the Military Situation on Dhofar as at 14 February 1972, MOD, London, 1972, p 12 John Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013 and 21 February 2014.

Although clandestine, the IRD and DFP also cooperated with other FO entities, in the form of the IPD's Information Officers, and the COID. That the head of DFP wrote the above statement on SPA in a cross departmental committee minute is significant to understanding the form of these bilateral relationships between various organisations throughout the period.

From only a handful of staff, the IRD steadily increased in size during the 1950s. The Head of IRD was in nearly every case a career FO Diplomat, although some had previously served in the wartime Political Warfare Executive and one went on to become C, the head of SIS. With the thread of wartime service still running through British society, it is hardly surprising that many of the members of IRD had previous service that related to political warfare. Aldrich and Cormac's study of British Prime Ministers identifies that nearly all post war Prime Ministers (with the exception of Harold Wilson) had previous experience of clandestine matters, including elements of political warfare. This either related to ministerial or government office (Attlee, Churchill, Eden, Macmillan), or service during the war (Douglas-Home and Heath). In 1955 IRD had a staff of less than a hundred, by 1962 they had grown to around 400.²⁵⁸ Specific to Aden the IRD had a small number of personnel deployed locally from around 1964 within the High Commission's Information Department.²⁵⁹ In Dhofar in-country operations were organised by a Special Air Service Senior Non-Commissioned Officer, with support from the Omani government and IRD.²⁶⁰ IRD staff sometimes stayed in the department for a long time and when they did move or promote, conducted similar work throughout their careers. For example, Norman Reddaway had served in the 'Phantom' GHQ Liaison Units during the Second World War and was an early IRD member. He was Director of the RIO Beirut 1960-64 and Assistant Under Secretary for Information and Cultural Affairs at the FO between 1970-1974.²⁶¹ This was similar to the DFP, where a relatively small permanent staff spent almost their entire careers there. By the 1960s and 70s, IRD was well established with strong liaison across the covert and overt apparatus of government, as well as journalists

²⁵⁸ Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* p 64.

²⁵⁹ The Assistant to the Information Advisor, a young FO Arabist (who worked for IRD) Derek Rose, was killed by the NLF on 20 October 1967. TNA, FCO 8/206 Sir Humphrey Trevelyan to Foreign Office, 21 October 1967.

²⁶⁰ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

²⁶¹ Obituary, *The Independent*, 3 November 1999 quoted in Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 29.

and academics.²⁶² In the latter case this allowed the IRD to draw on not only internal government experts but also an outside network of well-informed contacts.²⁶³

IRD was a large department and organised itself around geographic desks. The geographic desks were responsible for briefings on their areas and building and maintaining relationships with the IPD's Information Officer's in the field. For example, the IPD's office in Beirut, was used to disseminate IRD materials from the mid-1950s and later supported operations in Dhofar in the 1970s. There were several other RIO's for example, in the Far East. The Information Officers employed in the Embassies were key to the dissemination of IRD material. Bob Marett a Foreign Office member wrote that "the Information Officer is essentially a salesman and like any other salesman he has to discover the needs of his customers and try to provide them with what they want".²⁶⁴ The Information Officer provided the necessary local contacts to disseminate IRD material through the right channels.

The hub of IRD was its Editorial Section, first headed by Colonel Leslie Sheridan. Sheridan was a former member of SOE and had been recruited by the first head of IRD, Ralph Murray, in 1948. Sheridan had been an early member of SOE, coming from Section D of SIS, where he had organised black propaganda activities.²⁶⁵ He was replaced by Harold Herbert 'Tommy' Tucker, a journalist, who stayed with IRD until 1974. The Editorial Section was responsible for producing the department's material, both printed and radio programmes. In addition to Information Officers, the other means of disseminating IRD material was through 'front' organisations, which were often a legacy of wartime entities. Leslie Sheridan had set up some of them, namely the Arab News Agency and Britanova, with both these 'fronts' considered as methods to disseminate for covert and overt propaganda.²⁶⁶ As was to be the case with special operations in Southern Arabia, there was often cross over between former wartime operatives, commercial interests and political warfare activities.

²⁶² TNA, FO 953/1740 Propaganda in the Middle East – PR1041/50 Information Work in the Middle East.

²⁶³ Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* p 62.

²⁶⁴ Collier, *Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda* p 25 quoting from TNA, FO 953/2096 Notes on the Work of an Information Officer, 7 August 1962.

²⁶⁵ The Journalist Ben Macintyre writes that Sheridan had played a part in the original recruitment of Kim Philby. Ben Macintyre, *A Spy Among Friends: Philby and the Great Betrayal* (Bloomsbury Publishing: London, 2015) p 20.

²⁶⁶ TNA, DEFE 28/31 Annex A to JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations, British and Russian Methods of Disseminating Propaganda, 1 December 1947.

So far the thrust of IRD responsibilities has been identified as focused on anti-Communist activities. As Susan Carruthers argues in “A Red Under Every Bed”, there is a danger of viewing IRD activities during Britain’s decolonisation in this anti-Communist light. Carruthers argues that to focus solely on IRD in isolation is to “neglect the way in which its outputs articulated with, and sometimes contradicted, the publicity work undertaken in other parts of Whitehall, most specifically the Colonial Office”.²⁶⁷ IRD in particular were accused of trying to label any “militant anti-colonial leader as a Communist”.²⁶⁸ What is important to identify in relation to the campaigns in Southern Arabia is that there were two persistent ‘threats’ to Britain and the Empire in the post war world: Communism and subversive colonial nationalism. Whether there were real or imagined Communists under every bed, these themes persisted during the IRD and DFP’s existence and were reflected in the way they undertook operations.

As well as the issue of portraying nationalist adversaries as Communist, the very practice of IRD’s operations within the context of a wider political warfare campaign was potentially misunderstood and would later effect operations in Aden and Dhofar. From the start of the Cold War the military wanted an offensive political warfare programme, including economic warfare and a subversive propaganda strategy, specifically to “foment a civil war behind the Iron Curtain” with the aim being “to liberate the countries within the Soviet Orbit by any means short of war”.²⁶⁹ This was not the policy that had been agreed upon the establishment of IRD. The military advocated their favoured approach in an Imperial Defence College Paper presented by the then Commandant, Air Chief Marshal Slessor. Stephen Dorril and Lowell Schwartz both highlight the influence that the Imperial Defence College had at the time, with similarities between the strategy advocated in the paper and the aggressive political warfare operations conducted during the 1948 to 1950 period.²⁷⁰ The FO did not agree with such an approach, wanting to pursue a policy of using all opportunities (such as diplomacy, economic warfare and counter-propaganda) to weaken the USSR but avoiding any action which would risk escalation to military action.²⁷¹ The Service Chiefs were unimpressed with what they saw as a lack of cross-government

²⁶⁷ Susan Carruthers, “A Red Under Every Bed? Anti-Communist Propaganda and Britain’s Response to Colonial Insurgency”, *The Journal of the Institute of Contemporary British History* 9:2 (1995) p 296.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid* p 299.

²⁶⁹ Cormac, “The Pinprick Approach” p 9, citing TNA, FO 371/1687 Russia Committee Minutes, 25 November 1948.

²⁷⁰ Cold War Note by Commandant IDC July 1948; TNA AIR 75/116, Dorril, *MI6* p 82-3 and Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin* p 55.

²⁷¹ TNA, FO 800/503 PUS(31) British Policy Towards Soviet Communism, 28 July 1949.

planning, with regard to the Soviet Union and the use of more aggressive aspects of political warfare specifically.²⁷²

The continuing lack of agreement on the conduct of action against the USSR meant that the FO and Armed Forces could not agree a coherent policy for propaganda, a key element of political warfare for much of the next decade.²⁷³ This lack of a common approach meant that during the 1950s, political warfare was left to individual departments to conduct. In the case of Aden this lack of coordination during early parts of the campaign was a frustration. The formation of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) in 1964 to coordinate covert action in Aden and Indonesia appears to have produced, at times, a very modern cross-government approach, with close liaison over training and cooperation in the field of political warfare and counter-subversion. Such a relationship is reflected in the reciprocal training lectures that are documented in DFP files and also in the committees that were established at theatre level during some of the conflicts of decolonisation.²⁷⁴ Overall, interdepartmental arguments seem to have had little impact on IRD's approach to seeing propaganda and strategic psychological warfare/operations as one element of a successful political warfare strategy. Propaganda could only be effective if it was integrated with military, economic and diplomatic activities.²⁷⁵ This would mean that there was a positive relationship between individuals and across organisations dealing with political warfare and counter-subversion in Aden, even if the individual departments themselves did not agree.

The Directorate of Forward Plans

The first specific organisation to conduct strategic deception activity had been formed from a small staff in the Middle East in 1940 and became known as A Force. Other similar organisations were set up in the wartime theatres of operation.²⁷⁶ In 1942 a small section of the Joint Planning Staff was set up to coordinate strategic deception across various theatres. This became the London Controlling Section (LCS). Its role was three-fold; "preparing deception plans on a world-wide basis, co-ordinating deception plans prepared

²⁷² TNA, DEFE 28/31 JP (47) 118 (S) (Preliminary Draft) Chiefs of Staff Joint Planning Staff Special Operations, 1 December 1947.

²⁷³ TNA, FO 1110/307 PR/32/1 Copy of COS (49) 189 meeting between FO and Chiefs on Cold War Propaganda, 22 December 1949.

²⁷⁴ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Annex A to COS 48/69 Strategic and Tactical Deception A-12.

²⁷⁵ Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin* p 179-80.

²⁷⁶ For example, D Division in the Far East see TNA, WO 203/6381 Report to Combined Chiefs of Staff by Supreme Allied Commander SEAC 1943-46: secret supplement annexures S-V.

by commands at home and abroad, and controlling the supply of deception material to the Secret and Security services.”²⁷⁷ The DFP was a direct descendant of the wartime LCS, which had dealt with strategic deception during the Second World War, evolving to be the military component to political warfare in the Cold War.²⁷⁸ In the field of deception and through the Visual Inter-Service Training and Research Establishment (VISTRE)²⁷⁹ (later renamed the Joint Concealment Centre),²⁸⁰ the DFP provided a body of expertise, research and training for the Armed Forces. Later this support would develop as the DFP took responsibility for military psychological warfare, which gave it a link to the delivery of propaganda and led in turn to IRD supporting training.²⁸¹ Of note, consultation took place across departments including the Colonial Office, the COI, and the Service Ministries. The training links between DFP and IRD appear significant and will be developed in later chapters, relating to the specific operations in Aden and Dhofar. Through such cooperation, the DFP along with “the other organisations concerned with covert activities in the Cold War including the Information Research Department” began to integrate individual disciplines.²⁸² This was an important development in the coordination across Government of political warfare. This development was only one step in a slow process to integrate activities across departments. In Aden and South Arabia from 1964, the JAC played “an important role” in ensuring that covert action, encompassing activities of the IRD and DFP, was effectively synchronised across government departments.²⁸³

Having ‘lapsed’ at the end of the war, in 1947 the LCS was “reconstituted under the direction of an executive committee (the “Hollis Committee”)”.²⁸⁴ The Hollis Committee include high level representation from across Whitehall including the Chiefs of Staff, the FO and the intelligence agencies and was thus an early post war example of coordination committees for political warfare and counter-subversion being re-energised to bring together cross-government elements.²⁸⁵ Similar committees were later established to

²⁷⁷ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 48/69 History of United Kingdom Deception Organisation A1-1.

²⁷⁸ For details on this organisation see Michael Howard, *History of the Second World War, British Intelligence in the Second World War Volume 5 Strategic Deception* (London: HMSO, 1990).

²⁷⁹ TNA, AIR 20/11420 Inter-Service Meeting on the Future of VISTRE, 24 August 1951.

²⁸⁰ Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and intelligence in Britain 1945-1970* p 230.

²⁸¹ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Letter from Robin Andrew (IRD) to Group Captain PR Magrath (DFP), 20 February 1959.

²⁸² TNA, DEFE 28/179 Letter from Drew to Sir Harold Parker PUS MOD, January 1952.

²⁸³ Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 147-148. For further comment on the development of the JAC to “co-ordinate interdepartmental plans” see Cormac, Goodman & Holman, “A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action” p 17.

²⁸⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/1 1st Rough Draft ‘A Review of Deception Activities’ Part II Historical Background undated p 5.

²⁸⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/77 Hollis Committee: Terms of Reference.

coordinate counter-subversion and wider political warfare in Southern Arabia, as it was realised that without it, the different elements were sub-optimal.²⁸⁶ Further this lack of coordination might also hinder wider support to government strategy. Steven Dorril identified in the memoirs of the former chairmen of ICI, John Harvey-Jones, that he had been a member of the London Controlling Section in 1947.²⁸⁷ The Harvey-Jones memoirs are interesting because of the personal insight they give to the inner workings of the LCS, later the DFP:

“Like so many clandestine organisations, this [LCS] was the inheritor of a large and highly successful wartime set-up...The work was fascinating, but the insight it gave me into the ways by which our country was governed was even more dramatic...my paper sailed through the various committees and working parties. It shot into and out of the dockets, in-trays and minutes of Staff Officers of all three services, as well as the Foreign Office, MI6 and MI5”.²⁸⁸

From these personal reminiscences, there appears to be an understanding that political warfare capabilities – in this case deception – crossed organisational boundaries within government. As argued previously wartime experience would be a constant characteristic of many DFP personnel throughout the organisation’s existence.

The Hollis Committee was abolished in 1950 and the LCS moved to the Joint Planning Staff, responsible to the Chiefs of Staff. The cover name of the Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP) was chosen to remove any association with the continuing task of strategic deception.²⁸⁹ Research by the historian Huw Dylan, has also revealed that the name was viewed as attracting “too much attention in a colonial context”.²⁹⁰ Dylan’s work focuses on what parts of the wartime deception organisation were retained after the Second World War, operations in the late 1940s to mid-1950s and primarily those activities against the Soviet Union. This thesis adds fresh insight by looking at the links DFP built with the IRD and focuses on operations in the Middle East into the 1960s. What happened to the remnants of DFP after it was disbanded in 1968 will be covered in chapter four.

²⁸⁶ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Aden Working Group, Counter Subversion 1965.

²⁸⁷ Dorril, *MI6* p 157.

²⁸⁸ John Harvey-Jones, *Getting It Together: Memoires of a Troubleshooter* (London: BCA, 1991) p 161.

²⁸⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Confidential Annex to COS (50) 72 Meeting Held on Monday 8th May 1950 London Controlling Section p 4.

²⁹⁰ Dylan, “Super-weapons and Subversion” p 707.

The DFP name was used from December 1950.²⁹¹ DFP's head was a civilian, John Drew, and his deputy was an Army Officer, Colonel Noel Wild. There was also a representative from each of the three Services (Harvey-Jones was the Naval representative, for example²⁹²). In 1952 there were eight members of DFP; five in London, one in the Middle East and two in the Far East.²⁹³ Those deployed into the Middle and Far East were known as 'Forward Planning Officers'.²⁹⁴ There may also have been representatives from the security and intelligence agencies,²⁹⁵ but certainly the DFP was to maintain close links between itself and other departments.²⁹⁶ Huw Dylan noted that greater cooperation with Government bodies had been a prime reason for the increase in staff during the early Cold War.²⁹⁷ The Director of Forward Plans ranked as an Assistant Under Secretary and from 1950 was responsible for:

- “(a) Military deception policy.
- (b) The preparation of military deception plans.
- (c) The co-ordination of military deception plans in all Theatres.
- (d) Co-operation, as necessary with the Allies on military deception matters.”²⁹⁸

The DFP's *raison d'être* in 1952 was strategic deception, but this grew steadily to include counter-subversion, psychological operations, and community relations by 1966.²⁹⁹ Community relations were Armed Forces programmes designed to improve relations with local inhabitants around major garrison locations. Their application appears similar to modern military activities like civil affairs or civil military cooperation.³⁰⁰ The historian Kumar Ramakrishna describes such actions as having an intended “psychological impact” aimed to be greater than activity itself, such as digging a well or providing medical support.³⁰¹ In the early years there were attempts to use methods similar to wartime strategic deception against the Soviet Union. As technology and the political environment

²⁹¹ TNA, DEFE 28/70 Minute John Drew to the Joint Planning Staff, November 1950.

²⁹² See TNA, DEFE 28/1 Personal Vice Chief of Naval Staff Directorate of Forward Plans, 26 February 1959 which outlines the role of the DFP and explains the function of the Services representatives within it.

²⁹³ TNA, PREM 11/257 Minister of Defence Letter to Prime Minister, 2 September 1952.

²⁹⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/1 1st Rough Draft 'A Review of Deception Activities' Part II Historical Background undated p 7.

²⁹⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Annex to JP (50) 67 (Final) London Controlling Section Revised Terms of Reference, 2 June 1950 p 2.

²⁹⁶ TNA, DEFE 28/1 DFP/8/05 Directorate of Forward Plans Terms of Reference, 22 May 1952 p 1.

²⁹⁷ Dylan, “Super-weapons and Subversion” p 706.

²⁹⁸ TNA, DEFE 28/1 DFP/8/05 Directorate of Forward Plans Terms of Reference, 22 May 1952 p 1.

²⁹⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Directorate of Forward Plans, 10 May 1966 p 1.

³⁰⁰ See TNA, DEFE 28/1 Annex C Armed Forces Community Relations Programme, 10 May 1966.

³⁰¹ Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds 1948-1958* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015) p 14.

changed, the opportunity for these diminished.³⁰² As with IRD, DFP's original focus on the Soviet Union was slowly to be redirected to the bush fire wars of decolonisation. As the opportunities for strategic deception were limited, counter-subversion and psychological warfare/operations expanded to support counter-insurgency, or more specifically to counter subversive nationalist elements in the colonies, as in Aden and Dhofar.³⁰³ During the 1960s further refinements were made and tactical psychological warfare/operations reduced, with a revised focus on counter-subversion and strategic psychological operations in coordination with other Government departments. These would be the tools that would be deployed in Aden and Dhofar.

By the mid-1950s IRD and DFP were established as the covert agents of the strategy of political warfare and counter-subversion. They also liaised effectively with overt agencies to utilise these channels too. Early operations had focused on the direct threat of Soviet Communism and the potential for a conflict in Western Europe. For example, IRD hoped to use defectors as propaganda tools³⁰⁴ and the DFP studied opportunities for strategic deception against a Soviet attack across the North German plain.³⁰⁵ The DFP also supported efforts to deceive the Soviet Union of the precise details of British atomic weapons tests and this is one of the few DFP operations to have made its way into the public domain before the major release of records in the early 2010s.³⁰⁶ Although both organisations would continue to operate against the Soviet Union in Europe, the increasing 'winds of change' that started to blow through the empire would mean a concentration of effort elsewhere. Early efforts to coordinate information policy in counter-insurgency campaigns had mixed results. Covert action in Palestine and Iran brought some short-term gains. However, in the case of Palestine the propaganda effort failed to coordinate tackling the grievances of either side, whilst projecting and protecting Britain's international position. This failure to align communications with reality showed the limits of any political warfare capability (in this case propaganda) to make up for a lack of strategy.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Dylan, "Super-weapons and Subversion" p 726.

³⁰³ TNA, PREM 11/1582 Brook to Eden, 28 November 1955.

³⁰⁴ Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door* p 170.

³⁰⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/185 DFP/8/019 The Weser Plan, 24 November 1953.

³⁰⁶ TNA, PREM 11/292 Deception in Support of Operation "Hurricane", 6 June 1952 and Dorril, *MI6* p 156-160, Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin Book, 2007) p 177-179 and Aldrich, *Hidden Hand* p 372. Most recently Huw Dylan, "Operation TIGRESS: Deception for Counterintelligence and Britain's 1952 atomic test", *Journal of Intelligence History* 14:1 (2015).

³⁰⁷ Kate Utting, "Palestine 1945-48: Policy, Propaganda and the Limits of Influence", Greg Kennedy & Christopher Tuck (Ed), *British Propaganda and Wars of Empire: Influencing Friend and Foe 1900-2010* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014) p 95.

The disturbing experience of failure in Palestine was followed by a series of emergencies or low intensity conflicts in Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus that would run through much of the 1950s. The Malayan Emergency was a particularly formative period for British psychological operations. Practices from the campaign continued to be studied, with successors of the DFP in the National Defence College publishing a pamphlet on the subject in 1982.³⁰⁸ Works by historians such as, Kumar Ramakrishna and Thomas Maguire have highlighted the “critical role” propaganda and psychological warfare played in the conflict, as well as identifying and analysing the methods used.³⁰⁹ These techniques include ‘psychological intelligence’, the process for “constructing tailored and accurate propaganda and psychological warfare and disseminating it...to be efficient and influential”.³¹⁰ Their research shows the very specific intelligence requirements needed to target and influence people effectively, as well as the length of time required for the activities of political warfare to have an impact. The focus on the actual operations of political warfare in Malaya also demonstrates that it could not “function in a vacuum”.³¹¹ Policy and strategy must be aligned if political warfare was to effectively support the overall endeavour.

These operations in Malaya and elsewhere, demonstrated that the use of information was as important in peace as it had been in war. The line between conventional warfare and low intensity or counter-insurgency warfare could be thin. Political warfare still had a role to play and not just when conducting counter-insurgency operations where capabilities such as psychological warfare/operations could be particularly useful. The DFP also conducted community relations to improve communications with local inhabitants and foster good will.³¹² Cooperation and the coordination of the various capabilities was vital to an effective government political warfare and counter-subversion machine. The changing international situation saw a corresponding reduction in the perception that strategic deception was necessary or possible, with advances in imagery intelligence seeming to suggest that techniques in this area were outdated and outmoded. However, wartime

³⁰⁸ The author had served as a DFP Forward Planning Officer during the campaign. Archie Derry, *Emergency in Malaya: The Psychological Dimension* (Latimer: UK National Defence College, 1982).

³⁰⁹ Kumar Ramakrishna, “Content, Credibility and Context: Propaganda Government Surrender Policy and the Malayan Communist Terrorist Mass Surrenders of 1958”, *Intelligence and National Security* 14:4 (1999) p 243 and Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda* p 3-4.

³¹⁰ Thomas Maguire, “Interrogation and ‘Psychological Intelligence’: The Construction of Propaganda During the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1959” in Christopher Andrew and Simona Tobia (Eds), *Interrogation in War and Conflict: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2014) p 133.

³¹¹ Ramakrishna, “Content, Credibility and Context” p 244.

³¹² TNA, DEFE 28/1 Annex C Armed Forces Community Relations Programme, 10 May 1966.

'channels' such as the use of double agents and the relationships between the strategic deception organisation and the Security Service were maintained.³¹³ By 1962 however, DFP records state that there were no high placed "D.As" (double agents) although 'chicken feed' information was still being provided.³¹⁴

British Political Warfare and Counter-Subversion by the 1960s

The increased focus on coordinating military psychological warfare/operations, community relations and counter-subversion in the colonies, led to the development of a closer relationship between the DFP, the IRD and the more overt practitioners of political warfare. The government machinery that was eventually created at a local level during counter-insurgency campaigns in Malaya and elsewhere, was often comprehensive. It coordinated the distribution of propaganda, utilised deception (when possible) and special operations to target the adversary and sought to separate captured members from their comrades through integrated interrogation and intelligence processes.³¹⁵ However, to argue that such a 'doctrine' was developed across the British government would be to overstate this achievement. Most of the knowledge was developed and understood at the local level by the information Officers and Forward Planning Officers (in the case of IRD and the DFP) who were in the theatre of operations.

Although there does not appear to have ever been an official manual or handbook detailing the techniques of political warfare, it is possible to piece together elements of its methods through military doctrine. Analysis of these documents in relation to political warfare does not appear to have been conducted previously and therefore offers an opportunity to provide novel insights for this study. The documents produced with regard to counter-insurgency are particularly useful as they cover specific areas of political warfare such as propaganda, psychological and other special operations.³¹⁶ The cross-

³¹³ TNA, DEFE 28/1 1st Rough Draft 'A Review of Deception Activities' Part I Deception – Definitions, Tasks and Principles undated p 3.

³¹⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/1 1st Rough Draft 'A Review of Deception Activities' Part II Historical Background undated p 9.

³¹⁵ TNA, KV 4/408 The Malayan Emergency Report on Emergency Information Services, Sep 1950-Sep 1951, 14 Sep 1951 and TNA, DEFE 28/71 Forward Planning Instructions. See also Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p 180-184 and Walton, *Empire of Secrets* p 197-200.

³¹⁶ See, The War Office, *Keeping the Peace: Part 1 Doctrine* (London, HMSO, 1963) p 2, UK MOD, *Quelling Insurgency* 4-1 and 8-4, TNA, WO 279/649 Land Operations Volume III – Counter Revolutionary Operations Part 1 – Principles and General Aspects, 29 August 1969 p 41 and 85 and UK MOD, *Land Operations Volume III – Counter-Revolutionary Operations Part 1 – General Principles* (London: Ministry of Defence, 1977) p 37 and 39.

government nature of counter-insurgency means that although the documents were written with a military audience in mind, they often noted where and how collaboration between different departments should occur. Further, the counter-insurgency campaigns in the 1950s saw considerable numbers of both British officials and soldiers deployed. These included members of the IRD and DFP who were highly likely to have been exposed to the ideas within the counter-insurgency manuals. In order to make the complex subject of counter-insurgency more manageable, doctrine manuals identified the most important elements as principles. The principles are a useful assessment tool for the historian as they offer a way of understanding what factors were perceived as important for British counter-insurgent practitioners at different times.

From analysis of the contemporaneous documents two factors stand out. First, although not explicitly listed, methods that gain and maintain public support (propaganda, public relations or popular support) consistently appear as principles. Factors that would have improved the likely success of political warfare were consistently included too. The 1965 British manual, *Quelling Insurgency* wrote that, “[w]ithout a clearly stated policy, effective coordinated action is unlikely...Every department must act according to the government’s policy and in consultation with other departments.”³¹⁷ It was the methods of political warfare that aimed to build public support and influence the local population primarily through propaganda, psychological operations and community relations. These means would communicate messages or generate goodwill as ways to target a specific audience, challenging the insurgent narrative and convincing those targeted that they were better off supporting the government. The result would ideally be to “influence men’s minds and persuade them to do what you want them to do”.³¹⁸ To be effective, the military as the provider of security, needed to coordinate and integrate the methods of political warfare to synchronise government activity. Such an approach is consistent with the evidence from later operations in Southern Arabia, where political warfare activities attempted to support military operations by driving a wedge between the population and the insurgents. The second trend is in the importance placed upon activities that would support political warfare such as, the need to control the population, to integrate intelligence and measure the effect of operations. Although identified as principles of successful counter-insurgency, these areas appear to have been neglected or less coordinated in supporting political warfare. Therefore, although coordination was possible through cross

³¹⁷ UK MOD, *Quelling Insurgency* p 4-1. See also Hack, ‘Everyone Lived in Fear’ p 687.

³¹⁸ UK MOD, *Quelling Insurgency* p 7-4.

departmental committees and doctrine, whether these bilateral arrangements and documents really influenced government policy, particularly in relation to the campaign in Aden is questionable. Particularly in the case of South Arabia, the failure to better align different activities would lead to political warfare being less effective than it might have been.

By the 1960s political warfare and counter-subversion, as terms to represent the coordination of activities short of direct military action were better understood, as were the particular capabilities that could be used in counter-insurgency campaigns. For example, in 1965 during the confrontation with Indonesia the Chiefs of Staff were able to identify that they wished to “intensify the war of nerves”, instructing the DFP to investigate and create a dedicated committee that covered not only the military but other levers of political warfare.³¹⁹ In March 1965 the local Political Advisor suggested “the appointment of an individual to Singapore to give his undivided attention to the prosecution of political warfare”.³²⁰ The appointment was duly made and additionally a military liaison officer was included in the coordination body. “The organisation and its workings are considered to be most satisfactory”, presumably because the effect of bringing together specialist support assisted the Commander in Chief and made political warfare an effective way of supporting the strategic objectives.³²¹ However, barriers to further development were identified in both financial investment and policy development, “activities are restricted by financial stringency [and] lack of governmental policy directives”.³²²

Coordination of political warfare was obviously important and its practical application was evident from the Indonesian example above. Recent work by Rory Cormac, Michael Goodman and Tom Holman has continued to codify the activities of the JAC.³²³ The continuing membership of the IRD and DFP to such a body as the JAC appears to have demonstrated a requirement for their capabilities into the 1960s.³²⁴ If there had not been a need for the organisations to contribute to JAC activities, they would have surely ceased to attend. Before considering the British position in the Middle East in the next chapter it is worth noting that by the 1960s the strategic situation had once again changed.

³¹⁹ TNA DEFE 28/1 Directorate of Forward Plans Annex D Deception, 10 May 1966.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Appendix 1 to Annex A to COS 48/69 History of United Kingdom Deception Organisation A1-2. See also David Easter, “Keep the Indonesian pot Boiling: Western Covert Intervention in Indonesia October 1965-March 1966” *Cold War History* 5:1 (2005).

³²² TNA, DEFE 28/1 Annex A Counter Subversion Committee, 10 May 1966 p 2.

³²³ Cormac, Goodman & Holman, “A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action”.

³²⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Directorate of Forward Plans, 10 May 1966 p 1.

Interestingly, although evolving NATO strategies involved the coordination of strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Directorate of Forward Plans was considered important enough to warrant two places at TURNSTILE, the government nuclear bunker at Corsham.³²⁵ This bunker would have been the alternate headquarters for Britain's Government in the event of an imminent strategic attack on the United Kingdom. With places in such an establishment strictly limited, even after the Cuban Missile Crisis, political warfare capabilities were still considered to be of material utility even in nuclear stand-offs.

Approaching the period of study of political warfare and counter-subversion in the Middle East in the 1960s and 70s, Britain had established, tested and where necessary reorganised the tools. The early period of the Cold War had seen Britain and the US attempt to covertly challenge Soviet control of Eastern Europe and act to counter actual and perceived Communist agitation in the empire. The situation with regard to the utility of aspects of political warfare had changed, but in general the capability was still regarded as worth retaining. Further developments in its use and coordination will be considered in the following chapters specific to the case studies of Aden and Dhofar.

³²⁵ Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (2nd Ed) (London: Penguin Books, 2003) p 194.

Chapter Two – The Challenges and Threats to Britain’s Presence in the Middle East and the Tools Available to Preserve it, 1945-59

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the challenges that Britain faced as its presence and influence in the Middle East was increasingly threatened between 1945-59.³²⁶ This chapter will provide the context for the use of political warfare in the two later campaigns in Southern Arabia. Whilst contemporaneous global and regional actions played a part in charting the course of events in the region, there were also long term international, domestic and social factors at play. Analysis of the literature appears to demonstrate significant consistency in the British political approach towards the Middle East during the period.³²⁷ However, this consistency is an illusion as a deeper examination of the sweep of events demonstrates that successive governments laboured under assumptions about Britain’s place in the world and its ability to influence events at a time of rapid change. Whilst policy objectives may have remained the same, the ways to achieve them varied and were actually reactive, as British assumptions were tested in different arena.

This chapter will be structured to assess three themes, namely: the consideration of British Government assumptions (as seen through its global foreign and defence policy), new challenges to British objectives as the Cold War developed and the balancing of an increasingly limited number of tools available to secure its interests.³²⁸ This chapter does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of Britain in the Middle East. It is an assessment of why and how Britain’s vision of its continuing role in the Middle East came under pressure between 1945 and 1959. Most importantly, the background to the British campaigns in South Arabia and Oman can start to be explored. This chapter will also introduce how choices made by successive governments created the conditions for the apparent paradox of Britain’s retreat from the Middle East in 1967, and yet three years later it was waging a proxy Cold War conflict in the region. The chapter is a bridge between the evolution of British political warfare identified and assessed in chapter one and its use in the two case studies of this thesis. As such, this chapter helps to explain how and why political warfare became a key part of Britain’s strategy in the Middle East by 1959 and sets the conditions for further analysis of it in chapters 3 and 4.

³²⁶ The ‘Middle East’ is a term that is open to interpretation but the focus of this chapter is upon the Arab states stretching from Turkey in the north to Aden and the Persian Gulf in the south, from Libya in the West to Iran in the East.

³²⁷ William (Wm) Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Post-War Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

³²⁸ Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat From East of Suez* p 6.

Policy, Strategy and Informal Empire

Before analysing the effect of global and regional events on British policy and strategy, it is necessary to identify Britain's long-term objectives in the Middle East. These allow the assumptions of the British Government to be assessed which helps to contextualise the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar. By illuminating some of the assumptions relied upon, Britain's failure to achieve its objectives in the Middle East can start to be explored. This analysis starts to explain the particular use of political warfare as a way to achieve British objectives because assumptions about the country's place in the world did not change. Political warfare would therefore become an important way to favourably shape global and regional audiences to a key assumption; that Britain retained a world role even when its economic and military power was reduced. Debate about this fundamental assumption would continue to influence British Government decision making into the 1970s, which will be explored in later chapters.

Although this is not a theoretical study, it is important to define terms that will be used in this chapter, the rest of the thesis and to set a frame to analyse events. This study recognises Colin Gray's explanation of policy and strategy as the most comprehensive. Gray defines policy as "the political objectives that provide the purpose of particular strategies".³²⁹ He goes on to state that strategy is "the direction and use of means by chosen ways to achieve desired ends".³³⁰ As such the strategic concept of ends, ways and means provides a simple but often fiendishly difficult formula to unravel. In essence, strategy provides a bridge (the ways or methods) that coheres the policy (the ends, purpose or objectives) with the resources available (the means).³³¹ This is important because through understanding the theoretical interaction of policy and strategy, the strategic value of the Middle East to Britain will be drawn out, in turn explaining the rationalisation for the operations in Aden and Dhofar and the use of political warfare.

In the Middle East during the 1940, 50s and early 60s, British policy remained broadly aligned to its long-standing objectives of securing the area for trade, denying other powers influence and as an international transportation and imperial communication artery. This

³²⁹ Colin Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p 18.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Kate Utting, "Strategic Analysis 2", *Royal College of Defence Studies Lecture 2019* (London: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2019).

was why the Middle East was important for Britain.³³² Ernest Bevin encapsulated this in a 1949 statement:

“the Middle East is an area of cardinal importance to the UK...Strategically the Middle East is a focal point of communications, a source of oil, a shield to Africa and the Indian Ocean, and an irreplaceable offensive base.”³³³

In the Macmillan Government’s *Future Policy Study* published over a decade later in 1960, British interests were identified as still extending over the whole area of the Middle East and included:

“the containment of Russia...the safeguarding of trade and freedom of movement [and] continued access to oil.”³³⁴

British policy during the fifteen years from 1945-1959 therefore, remained wedded to the advancement of these vital national interests, tied to which was the desire to maintain Britain’s standing on the world stage through prestige and influence. How this was to be achieved is of the most interest for this study and the continuation of long-established relationships in the Middle East was the key way that Britain had to achieve its objectives. The retention of Southern Arabia was an important part of this strategy.³³⁵

That Britain’s objectives changed very little over fifteen years perhaps offers the hope that they were realistic. Certainly, this would have been the impression at the time when the Middle East was seen as of “cardinal importance”.³³⁶ After the Second World War however, Britain struggled to deal with economic problems, an array of new international obligations and an expansionist Soviet Union. Its interests in the Middle East came under pressure through the rise of Arab nationalism (including the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict) and American intervention.³³⁷ Policy was therefore, shaped by a combination of economic, political and military considerations. In attempting to deal with these issues, successive British governments continued to utilise a world system that had been constructed earlier in the century, in which a concerted effort was made to move away from holding territory with military forces and direct governance to a less costly one of

³³² Robert T Harrison, *Britain in the Middle East 1619-1971* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) p x.

³³³ TNA, CAB (49) 188, 25 August 1949 cited in Alan Bullock *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-1951* (London, Heinemann, 1983) p 113.

³³⁴ TNA, CAB 129/100 Future Policy Study, 1960-70, 24th February 1960 p 31.

³³⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 3.

³³⁶ Ernest Bevin writing as Foreign Secretary, cited in Bullock *Ernest Bevin* p 113.

³³⁷ Sluglett, “Formal and Informal Empire in the Middle East” p 421.

political influence.³³⁸ Political warfare, by gaining and holding support for the continuation of such a system, was a key way of achieving this. Empire in the Middle East was largely informal, apart from a few colonies of which Aden was one, the majority being made up of mandates and treaties with local states. These diplomatic instruments defined Britain's dealings with the territories but the relationships were ultimately based on the ability to 'persuade' local leaders and therein the population to collaborate. This has been called "empire-on-the-cheap".³³⁹ Whilst true, this highlights the real issue facing Britain during the whole period of this study; how to maintain its interests at a time of, reduced resources, competing commitments and new threats.

For the Conservatives who were the governing party from 1951-64, the majority of the period under study, there were differing views on the best methods to achieve objectives. On one side prominent figures, including Winston Churchill, argued that a firm policy must be maintained, one that held on to what Britain had and refused to 'scuttle', a term he coined as a pejorative one during the evacuation of the oil refinery at Abadan in 1951. These arguments were codified by the so-called Suez group over the negotiation of withdrawal from the Egyptian base. After the Suez crisis the same arguments were advanced with regard to thoughts of leaving Aden. Members therefore, became known as the 'Aden Group'. Others in the party felt that if a continued world role was desired then it must be through either influence of its existing clients or through friendly relations after independence and the use of suitably pro-British persons in influential posts. Attempts to restructure the existing system of relationships through either traditional elites or British supporters often looked like the emperor's new clothes. Even given historical hindsight, the prevailing view amongst Government ministers and officials was that it was most effective to concentrate its influence on the elite leadership groups, some of which Britain had empowered after the Great War. British policy was therefore, to target measures of support towards these groups rather than the mass population or 'Arab street'.³⁴⁰ This can be seen in the way that the Federation structures were designed in Aden and the Protectorates, which favoured the established rulers and, in the support, given to the deeply unpopular Sultan of Oman up until 1970.

³³⁸ John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p 90.

³³⁹ Glen Balfour-Paul, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East" in, Judith Brown and Wm Roger Louis (Eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p 491.

³⁴⁰ Vaughan, *The Failure of American and Britain Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957* p 65.

The deliberate targeting of the elites who, in many cases failed to appreciate the views of ordinary Arabs, misunderstood how influential the chosen leadership really was and tied British influence to one particular group or individual, as in Iraq before 1958 and later in South Arabia. At a time when Arab thinking was beginning to view such traditional elites as out of touch, Britain's policy of utilising their support was understandable but ultimately misguided. The understandable desire to maintain established relationships and therein maintain Britain's position of influence, ultimately led to conflict from the Suez Canal to the streets of Aden and on to the deserts of Oman as two visions for the future of the region battled it out.

Assumptions

From the analysis of Britain's interests certain assumptions held by decision makers and officials can be identified. The primary assumption was that the retention of Britain's worldwide role was a prerequisite for the maintenance of prestige and influence as a great power. Churchill famously conceptualised British foreign policy in 1948 as operating within three concentric circles, with Britain (as a great power) at the centre and the US special relationship, Europe and the Colonies and Commonwealth radiating out.³⁴¹ By operating across all three circles, policy and strategy was likely to be more pragmatic and British influence increased. In the Middle East, where there were few British Colonies, a further assumption was that informal empire was the vehicle for Britain's continued influence in the region. Since at least the 1870s, Britain had built informal empire and after 1945 Government ministers and officials both in London and 'on the ground' "steadfastly resisted the loss of a special role in the world".³⁴² The federation of Aden and the Protectorates was an example of this way of consolidating influence and maintaining presence globally. Those whose memories chart the events from the region tell us that "both Labour and Conservatives, were like teams embarking on what they believed to be a timeless game".³⁴³ Unfortunately the rules of this game were rapidly changing in the 1940s and 50s.

³⁴¹ Brian White, "British Foreign Policy" in Roy Macridis (Ed), *Foreign Policy in World Politics* (London: Prentice Hall International, 1992) p 8.

³⁴² Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 31.

³⁴³ Anthony Parsons writing in Glen 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, 2008) p xvi.

The assumption that Britain had the agency to retain its predominant position, using the same relationships it had relied upon was misplaced. The social and political makeup of the region was changing and a different vision for the Middle East was offered through Egyptian led Arab nationalism, consolidated under the charismatic leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser after 1955. By continuing to utilise relationships with traditional elites, Britain role in the Middle East was directly challenged by Nasser's own vision for the region, in which Egypt and he were the leaders. Britain's regional allies' vulnerability to Nasser's ideology came to fruition with the revolution in Iraq 1958. Britain's long-term policy gave way to "hasty improvisation" and with important choices made on the basis of political urgency rather than pragmatically.³⁴⁴ The decision to withdraw from Aden and therein doom the Federation of South Arabia is an example of this crisis led decision making. By continuing the study beyond 1967 however, the campaign in Oman demonstrates that although the British had been forced to withdraw its physical presence, its influence could still achieve success, supporting allies, building an international coalition and ultimately securing economic and political interests. The 'so what' for this study can be explained by sticking with Colin Gary's theoretical structure of ends, ways and means noting, that "when policy is uncertain...the strategic function cannot work".³⁴⁵ Fundamentally British policy did not match with its strategy from 1945-59 because the ends it set were not matched by the means to achieve them and were therefore, unrealistic because there were no ways to coordinate them. The emphasis on the three circles of British foreign policy did change as Britain withdrew from East of Suez. The campaign in Oman however shows that British decolonisation was not simply decline but ultimately about transforming policy objectives so the way they could be met was within the ways and means available.

Moment or Misunderstanding

Before exploring Britain's attempt to continue informal empire after the Second World War it is worthwhile commenting on the different approaches of historians to Britain's role in the Middle East. This will place the study in the surrounding body of work and help to expose themes for the next section. Elizabeth Monroe's account, considered a classic, wrote of a 'moment' when Britain was the "paramount power" in the Middle East but her concept of a

³⁴⁴ Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* p xvi.

³⁴⁵ Colin S Gray, *Theory of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p 145.

'moment' can be argued to be flawed.³⁴⁶ Britain had traded with the region for hundreds of years before the Great War and had a presence in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula from the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁴⁷ France was also a significant force in the Middle East during the same forty year period (1917-1957) that Monroe wrote about.³⁴⁸ Further, writing as British power had changed by the 1970s, Monroe's work captured the Zeitgeist of the inter-war generation who lived through the Suez crisis but falls into the trap of seeing the 'moment' as ending abruptly in 1956. Other arguments have been that the period was one of either continuation of imperial policy³⁴⁹, transition of power to the US³⁵⁰ or retreat. None are completely satisfactory in capturing all the factors that influenced events and perhaps this is best summed up by John Gallagher when he states that decolonisation was never the result of a single factor. Gallagher argued that "political growth overseas, domestic constraints in the metropolis and international pressures" were the key considerations and that decolonisation should not therefore, be thought of as a linear process.³⁵¹

John Darwin provides a multifaceted account of British decolonisation but emphasises the role that the Second World War had in triggering transformations that effectively destroyed the old pre-war relationships that British imperial power relied upon.³⁵² As America rose in stature, it and Britain contrived in a dance of cooperation and competition.³⁵³ This was not an American conspiracy but at different times the British almost certainly felt that the competition was more fulsome than the cooperation. As such Britain's ability to act on the world stage changed over the three decades after the Second World War. Its declining economic and military power contributed to the rate of decolonisation and highlight a number of significant issues for the case studies of this thesis. It was however, a combination of four factors: the economic, social change, the international situation and

³⁴⁶ Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-71* p 11. For recent discussion of Monroe's impact see, Mangold, *What the British Did* p 2 and Roger Hardy, *The Poisoned Well: Empire and its Legacy in the Middle East* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016) p 2.

³⁴⁷ Jeffrey R Macris and Saul Kelly (Eds), *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012) p xi.

³⁴⁸ For a recent study of Anglo-French rivalry in the region see, James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle That Shaped the Middle East* (London, Simon & Schuster, 2012).

³⁴⁹ John Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944-49* (London: Leicester University Press, 1993).

³⁵⁰ Richie Ovendale, *Britain, The United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-1962* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

³⁵¹ Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* p xvi and 152-153.

³⁵² Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* p 24.

³⁵³ Wm Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonisation" in Wm Roger Louis, *The Ends of British Imperialism* (London: IB Tauris, 2006) p 451.

challenge from the colonies themselves, that help to explain the contraction of Britain's formal and informal imperial control after 1945.³⁵⁴

The interpretation by some historians that suggests a single event or factor accounts for Britain's changing relationship with the Middle East lacks perspective. This is because they fail to explain that important ties have survived the military and political withdrawal of the late sixties, allowing a legacy of British influence to continue (on or over the region) that still exist.³⁵⁵ What might be termed 'periodisation' of events into neat chapters creates the problem of hindsight by the historian and encourages seeing one event simply happening after another. The most comprehensive argument is to see Britain's position in the Middle East as being in transition (and continuing to be so). Historians such as David Reynolds and Robert T Harrison have produced studies that look at the "openness of events" which potentially allow for clear analysis as historical actions and actors can be seen as they were at the time.³⁵⁶ In the case of this study, this is helpful because it makes the author look at previous decisions and assumptions and how they pull through to events during the period in question. William (Wm) Roger Louis' work therefore, stands out as an analysis that successfully "reconstructed official thinking".³⁵⁷ His work, *Britain's Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951* argues convincingly that even given the economic stresses on Britain, policy makers attempted to adapt Britain's position in the Middle East, taking account of Arab nationalist fervour.³⁵⁸

That this was less than successful is important but the limitation for this study is that Wm Roger Louis stops with the change of Labour to Conservative Government in 1951. Events such as Suez are the turning point of British action in the region and the withdrawal from Aden and the Gulf can also be seen in a different light because they are part of a longer timeline, rather than simply the start or the finish. The works of Elie Kedourie is helpful in understanding issues over a longer timeline.³⁵⁹ Fundamentally these revolve around transactional choices by Britain to support nationalistic ambitions, which ultimately came to undermine attempts to alter the system of client states and regional organisations and destabilised Britain's position. Seeing the transformational nature of Britain's position

³⁵⁴ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 8.

³⁵⁵ Harrison, *Britain in the Middle East 1619-1971* p xiv.

³⁵⁶ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman, 2000) p 3 and Harrison, *Britain in the Middle East* p 210.

³⁵⁷ Darwin, "Decolonisation and the End of Empire", p 553.

³⁵⁸ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51*.

³⁵⁹ See predominantly Elie Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World* (London: Mansell, 1980) but also, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle East Studies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970).

in such a manner means that this chapter's analysis does not stop when Britain withdraws from Aden or the Gulf but looks at how the relationship with the region continued to change during the 1970s.

Challenges to Britain's Presence in the Middle East

Global Lens: The Cold War Overlay

Having assessed the assumptions that underpinned British Government decision making, it is important to consider the global situation and changes affecting national interests. The cooling of relations between the major wartime allies from 1944 to 1948 which became the Cold War, represented the most direct threat to the United Kingdom during the latter twentieth century. That Britain's Governments should see the Soviet Union as the biggest threat to its national interests is therefore, no surprise. Britain's dwarfing in economic and military terms relative to the two superpowers of the United States and Soviet Union was a dramatic change. In the aftermath of the Second World War however Britain was able to retain its prestige despite these developments. For this study, the Cold War overlay means, that the spread of Communism (whether Soviet or Chinese inspired) was a continued threat to British interests, the Empire and its spheres of influence. Political warfare was an early way that the Government attempted to counter the Soviet challenge to British strategic interests in the Middle East.³⁶⁰ The early use of political warfare is an indication that Britain saw benefits from its methods and of the importance of the region.

The Cold War played a significant part in British Government decisions, with early considerations being the defence of the Middle East against Soviet influence and the use of the areas as a military launchpad in the event of war. The region was also deemed vital to the securing of Britain's political and economic interests. This meant that the British presence in the region had to be maintained and that the Government needed to carefully consider its actions if it was to achieve objectives within increasingly finite resources. This balancing act was crucial in ensuring the continued economic benefit of access to cheaper oil as it underpinned the British economy throughout this period. Military basing in the region therefore had two functions; that of protecting the region in the context of the global

³⁶⁰ TNA, FO 371/77622 Permanent Under-secretary Committee report 31, 27 July 1949.

Cold War, whilst also ensuring the flow of oil continued. This meant that the military base in Aden increased in importance during the 1950s as it provided forces to defend Kuwait where over fifty per cent of British oil came from. These factors helped to shape the use of political warfare as a way of not just countering Communism but against anti-British nationalism too.³⁶¹

The first nationalist challenge to Britain's post war position in the Middle East emerged in Palestine but the objective of retaining influence and prestige through maintaining a regional presence would be similarly challenged by Egyptian led Arab nationalism. To the Egyptians, Britain and not the Soviet Union represented its real enemy.³⁶² The occupation of Egypt by Britain in 1882 and its continued presence after supposed independence in 1922 was a source of frustration that was manifested through the British Suez Canal Zone base. From 1951, the British garrison in Egypt, in place to deter the Soviet Union, became fully occupied with defending itself from the Egyptians. The lack of resources directed towards countering the aspiration of Egyptian sponsored Arab nationalism were caused not only by an inherent shortage of such means. The British Government also failed to identify the greatest enemy to its objectives in the Middle East and therefore, align its ways to counter it. Focused on the context of the Cold War neither the British or their American allies appreciated the depth of Egyptian enmity and they may well have sneered at their ability to do anything about it.³⁶³ This misunderstanding of the situation would lead indirectly to the biggest crisis in Anglo-American relations – the Suez crisis.

The Cold War played a significant part in British policy and strategy in the Middle East during the 1940s and 50s but it also had an effect on the way the threat of Arab nationalism was ineffectively countered. Communist ideology and the threat of Soviet oppression were difficult to project to a Middle East audience whereas the history of British activity in the region was a commanding narrative. Anti-colonialism was understandable to an Arab audience in a way that British appeals to the maintenance of its influential position were more difficult to explain. British political warfare would therefore struggle to project a positive image of Britain, in a way that it did not when confronting Communism. Arab nationalism with its emphasis on removing outside powers and unifying the region was

³⁶¹ Scott Lucas, "A Bright Shining Mecca": British Cultural and Political Warfare in the Cold War and Beyond" in Wm Roger Louis (Ed) *Yet More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: IB Tauris, 2005) p 359.

³⁶² Michael J Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-54* (London: Frank Cass, 1997) p 325.

³⁶³ Ibid p 327.

therefore the real threat to British interests during the 1950s and into the 1960s. Addressing this challenge to British power and influence in the Middle East would be a problem for successive British Governments all the way through the campaign in South Arabia.³⁶⁴ Ultimately Britain would be unable to secure a friendly successor state in its only regional colony (Aden), which would create the conditions for further conflict in Oman.

Regional Perspective: Changing Order and the Nasserite Threat to Informal Empire

In understanding 'nationalism' in the Middle East, it is important to recognise that the underlying goal of both Arab *and* Jewish nationalism was broadly for a political unity of their peoples, not simply a cultural association.³⁶⁵ This was achieved and then defended by the Jews with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. For the Arabs it was never fully achieved but growth in the ideology would directly affect British interests in the Middle East. The gradual weakening and then defeat of the Ottoman Empire had led to the establishment of several new Arab states in the Levant after the Great War. This had both positive and negative connotations for the Arab nationalist cause. Any obligation to another cultural or religious authority had been removed by the demise of the Ottoman Turks and offered the opportunity for the ideology of Arab nationalism to fill the void. The creation of new nation states such as Iraq and Trans-Jordan however, created tension between the ideology's objective of forming a unified Arab state and the ambitions of the new governments. As the British and French had been primarily responsible for the creation and certainly benefited from the newly formed Arab states, their continued presence in the Middle East was seen as a barrier to the unification of all Arabs. The writings of the foremost Arab nationalist theoretician, Sati' al-Husri demonstrate this, when he argued that as the Arab states were creations of imperial powers, driven by their interests, then the intended consequence was to keep the Arabs state's political and military development feeble.³⁶⁶ In doing so the interests of the imperial powers was guaranteed through their client Arab states. The goal of the removal of Western influence and the Arab Governments they utilised therefore became a powerful unifying force for not only Arab nationalists but also anti-imperialists, of which President Nasser would become the most prominent figure.

³⁶⁴ Robert McNamara, "The Nasser Factor: Anglo-Egyptian Relations and Yemen/Aden Crisis 1962-65", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 53:1 (2017) p 52.

³⁶⁵ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* p 13.

³⁶⁶ Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Arabism First* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayeen, 1965) p 149.

The allure of Arab nationalism was the glue that could bind different aspirations for release from foreign control, through the narrowing of the perceptions of the pre-war theologians of Arab nationalism and the masses. Education was key to this process, with school attendance beyond primary level increasing dramatically in countries like Iraq and Egypt during the 1920s and 30s.³⁶⁷ The more urban, literate group that resulted from these educational initiatives were then exposed to more of the world through wartime movements and mass media. As citizens of Arab countries enlisted or their countries were mobilised for the global struggle, then people visited or were exposed to new experiences as never before. As wartime radio broadcasts and newsprint propaganda increased so did the proliferation of radio receivers, the dissemination of newspapers and therein ideas.³⁶⁸ These significant changes in the social conditions of ordinary Arabs meant a growing political awareness. The late 1940s were a time of rapid expansion of Arab nationalist ideas of which Sati' al-Husri played a significant role in popularising the ideology in the Middle East.³⁶⁹ What this meant was that a wider section of society than previously had been the case were now questioning the rationale for foreign domination. Al-Husri's writings continued to be influential in part because of his proposal that as the most populist country in the Middle East, Egypt should take the lead on Arab unification. President Nasser was able to intervene in this theoretical debate, resolve the issue by arguing that Arab nationalism could be a vehicle for combating Israel, removing foreign intervention from Egypt and as a way of propelling himself as the leader of the Arab world. Therefore, President Nasser's "innovation" was in showing how Egyptian interests were consistent with Arab nationalism.³⁷⁰ In this way his attacks against the traditional elites in the Middle East not only removed opposition to his plan but also Britain's allies, as was the case in South Arabia.

Instruments of power

Power is an important factor in the ability of one nation to achieve its desired ends or political objectives. It is not simply physical manifestations such as a strong economy or the possession of a large and capable military. By examining the levers of power available to Britain between 1945-59, ministers and officials' options become more understandable. National power is cognitive, in the way that instruments can be used to attract, dissuade or

³⁶⁷ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* p 125-126.

³⁶⁸ Balfour-Paul, *Ending Empire in the Middle East* p 13.

³⁶⁹ Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (London: University of California Press, 1976) p 43.

³⁷⁰ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 8.

persuade others to conduct their behaviour in a certain manner. This begins to explain why a strategy of political warfare would be seen as a way to maintain Britain's interests in the Middle East. For example, in the Middle East in 1945, Britain wielded huge military forces in the area but could not force the Egyptian Government into a treaty that would have safeguarded the military base there. An explanation of the interaction of different instruments of power is important because the resulting outcomes determines policy and thereby strategy. Britain was numerically a greater military power during the Aden campaign than it was in Oman a decade later yet achieved success in the latter and not in the former.³⁷¹ Military power alone did not determine the outcome of each campaign. If policy objectives are the ends that strategy achieves, then the instruments are the ways, when properly synchronised, that should enable the achievement of the end.³⁷² The theoretical examination of Britain's instruments of power is important to the wider study because it helps to explain how Britain failed to achieve its stated objectives in the region. Such an examination starts to explain the contradictions in British thinking and ultimately why it was campaigning in Aden and Dhofar. The instruments will be examined in the following sequence, economic, military, diplomatic and informational (including influence). This is because more than any other lever, Britain's economic performance constrained decision makers options and led them to look for other ways to achieve objectives. As other methods became more limited due to cost or other factors, political warfare would increasingly become the only tool available.

Economic. This was the area of greatest importance to British interests, conversely it was also the area of greatest risk and decline. British interests in the Middle East grew as a function of Britain's expanding economy. As the British Empire grew, the Middle East – as a strategic crossroads – became of the greatest importance to an expanding global power with interests now spread to Africa and the Far East. As such, having freedom of passage or friendly bases and ports from where power could be projected into the Middle East also meant that this important hub needed to be protected and denied to others.³⁷³ The relationship between economies and empire was at the heart of expansion (and contraction) of Britain's world presence, something that would continue to dominate British interests in the Middle East.

³⁷¹ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 35.

³⁷² The Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS), *Getting Strategy Right (Enough)* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2017) p 31.

³⁷³ Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* p 88-89.

The military victory in the Second World War, had come at “the cost of a great economic defeat”.³⁷⁴ American assistance, particularly financial, had been vital in eventual victory. Britain was nearly bankrupt, beholden to its wartime creditors (including the US but also countries such as Egypt) and faced with increased overseas commitments in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Even before the end of the war in the Far East, the Labour Government’s chief economic advisor, John Maynard Keynes was warning that Britain faced the threat of a “financial Dunkirk”³⁷⁵ This warning did not lead the new Labour Government nor its Conservative successor to reassess British global policy. To them, the increased commitments were seen as the mark of a great power and Britain would carry them out come what may.

Ambitious social programmes, new technologies and the increased responsibilities needed to be paid for and Britain’s economic recovery and productivity were dogged by financial crises from the late 1940s, culminating in the dramatic devaluation of sterling in 1967. The emergence of the Cold War meant that Britain had to sustain a large amount of spending on defence to address the threat of the Soviet Union and defend its interests. British colonial possessions could provide raw materials and food that could be paid for in pounds. Some, like Aden, had been neglected but now took on a new importance with its oil refinery built in the 1950s. Access to cheap oil from British owned installations in the Middle East were therefore an immensely valuable instrument, lubricating the British economy and something that Britain was readily prepared to defend. This helps to explain why Aden was chosen as a military base, as well as the home to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s refineries and was the busiest port in the area. Economic considerations also explain why Britain continued to support friendly rulers in the Middle East even after it supposedly pulled out in 1971. It would be untrue to argue that Britain’s economic woes were such as to leave it poverty stricken but as a smaller part of the world economy, Britain experienced a change in its economic power.³⁷⁶ A country’s economy health is inseparable from all other areas, necessitating the balancing of aspiration with commitment.³⁷⁷ The impact of economic decline is key to understanding significant constraints on the other instruments of British power, as will be seen.

³⁷⁴ Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat From East of Suez* p 8.

³⁷⁵ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* p 66.

³⁷⁶ Alec Caincross, *The British Economy Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p 297. See also Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500-2000* (London: Fontana, 1989).

³⁷⁷ Darwin, “Decolonisation and the End of Empire” p 548.

Military. There is an obvious connection between the economic health of a nation and its ability to fund its armed forces.³⁷⁸ In the military arena, Britain held significant armed forces in the Middle East during the period of 1945-1959. The geographical crossroads of the entire region had long provided convenient bases for deployment across the Empire and, after the Second World War, as a spring-board for the planned counter-offensive against the Soviet Union, should the Third World War have begun.³⁷⁹ The defence of this area was vital for mandate and treaty obligations but most importantly, the protection of British economic interests. This helps to explain why Aden was considered as a key British base in long term strategic planning, before and beyond the Suez crisis.³⁸⁰ After 1957 it was thought that its distance from the destabilising ideology of Arab nationalism would make it ideal, isolated socially and politically but linked economically and militarily, so becoming the headquarters of British Forces in the Middle East in the early 1960s. Conveniently located close to the Gulf for the protection of its oil, Aden was a hub in the strategy of defending the region from the periphery.³⁸¹

Given the increased commitments taken on at the end of the war from North Africa to Southern Asia, the British military were continually overstretched. Britain's traditional military reserve in the form of the Indian Army was not available from 1946, when Indian independence was finalised.³⁸² With reserves depleted, there was a resultant difficulty in generating the military hard power that had previously underpinned British indirect rule and influence in the Middle East. Indeed, as economic pressure increased over the following decades there would be almost constant demands from the Treasury for cuts to defence spending and, especially, spending overseas. When Harold Macmillan was the Chancellor in 1956, he stated that "it is defence expenditure which has broken our backs".³⁸³ The pressure on Britain's balance of payments was increased exponentially by the expensive overseas commitments. Lessons from the crisis informed the significant Sandy's Defence Review of April 1957.³⁸⁴ The review contained a forward-looking assessment of Britain's

³⁷⁸ A form of words that usually begins a significant Defence Review and usually means significant cuts. See the 1966 Defence white paper in which Denis Healy stated, "military strength is of little value if it is achieved at the expense of economic health". TNA, CAB 129/124 Defence Review: Part 1, 11 Feb 1966 p 1.

³⁷⁹ Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East* p 83.

³⁸⁰ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 4.

³⁸¹ Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956-1959* (London: Macmillan, 1971) and Alistair Horne, *Macmillan: Volume II of the Official Biography 1957-1986* (London: Macmillan, 1989) p 188.

³⁸² Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2007) p 231. See also Gallagher, *Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* p 144.

³⁸³ TNA, PREM 11/1326 Macmillan to Eden, 23 March 1956.

³⁸⁴ See Saul Kelly and Anthony Gorst, "Whitehall and the Suez Crisis", *Contemporary British History* 13:2 (1999) p 1-11.

strategic interests but recognised that the overall cost of defence needed to be a smaller part of British expenditure. Accordingly the overall size of the Armed Forces was reduced, as national service was ended and deterrence provided through nuclear weapons based on aircraft and submarines. The number of troops stationed in overseas garrisons were also reduced but the formation of strategic reserve based in Britain was designed to reinforce such bases by air if necessary. As Prime Minister in 1959, Macmillan continued to fear the instability that the balance of payments issue caused. It was partly this concern for a re-assessment of British foreign policy that prompted Sir Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, to propose what would become the *Future Policy Study*.³⁸⁵ This report was to detail how Britain's global position would change over the next decade and aid decision makers in considering how British policy might be adapted.³⁸⁶ Unfortunately the final report was drafted by different government departments which resulted in contradictory conclusions. While Treasury officials argued that British commitments overseas could not be sustained by the capability of the economy, there was no change to UK objectives. This was because the departments dealing with foreign affairs (the Colonial Office, Foreign Office and the military) argued that the retention of such global commitments actually served Britain's interests. Without a significant uplift in Britain's economy performance demands for cuts to overseas spending would continue well into the 1960s.

Another area of concern was that the physical presence of forces also stoked unrest as increased calls for independence and the rise of Arab nationalism spread. Forces, such as those based in the Suez Canal Zone and later Aden, offended the idea of independent states and offered tempting targets for insurgents. The Labour politician, Denis Healy, wrote in his memories that the presence of British troops in the region was "an irritant rather than a stabilising factor".³⁸⁷ A further manifestation of the limits of the military instrument after the withdrawal from the Suez base was in the difficulties faced in gaining overflight rights. As the military had planned on creating a strategic reserve in the United Kingdom that could project force quickly, these developments limited options in several crises including in Jordan in 1958 and Kuwait in 1961.³⁸⁸ When violence flared in South Arabia in 1964, an element of the strategic reserve was dispatched. The type of operations to quash the rebellion in Radfan however, only "temporarily suppressed" the

³⁸⁵ TNA, PREM 11/2945 Brook to Macmillan, 20 February 1959.

³⁸⁶ TNA, CAB 134/1929 Study of Future Policy, 7 June 1959.

³⁸⁷ Dennis Healy, *The Time of my Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989) p 280.

³⁸⁸ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat From East of Suez* p 25 and Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* p 211.

violence and the operation demonstrated a flaw in the model envisaged by the Sandy's Defence Review.³⁸⁹ Whilst the reductions in manpower had cut costs, the continuing overstretch of British forces meant a permanent increase in South Arabia could not be provided. Any success due to the surging of forces was therefore only ever temporary and would not provide a permanently security solution.³⁹⁰

Diplomatic. At the end of the Second World War Britain "bestrode the Arab world...[in a] Colossus posture [which] may have been deceptive and increasingly resented but it could not be denied".³⁹¹ Britain's use of treaties and mandates to facilitate control indirectly, rested on local clients, royalty and tribal leaders. All these might be considered conservative and traditional, who often owed their own position to British favour. As a group they were viewed by the British as able to exercise control better than any other alternative. That Britain worked through a very narrow elite of influential figures was not regarded as unnatural and, in the past, it had worked. It is important however to note that this very system not only generally excluded the masses but more explicitly it meant that some ethnic or social groups were disenfranchised and had little stake in the survival of these pro-British regimes. The overall lack of investment below the traditional elites, hardly built support for the British however informal their presence might be.³⁹² This meant that there was a ready-made group of people whose resentment of Britain's domination of their country might well follow charismatic leaders, such as President Nasser or General Kassem, when they promised to remove it.

Britain encouraged (at least openly) a greater degree of Arab unification, assuming it would not lead anywhere but if it did then it might present opportunities for Britain in the Middle East.³⁹³ In an example of how British assumptions could be undone, the Arab Leagues headquarters were eventual establishment in Cairo, rather than Baghdad as the British (and Iraqis) had envisaged, marking a "watershed" moment for Egypt's role in the Middle East.³⁹⁴ This outcome not only created the conditions for a rival to the leadership of the Arab world from that of the British backed, Hashemite rulers in Iraq and Jordan but also saw Egypt established as the focus for growing opposition to British hegemony.

³⁸⁹ French, *Army, Empire & Cold War* p 261.

³⁹⁰ French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency* p 241.

³⁹¹ Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* p 9.

³⁹² Balfour-Paul, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East" p 501.

³⁹³ Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World* p 66 and 77.

³⁹⁴ Balfour-Paul *The End of Empire in the Middle East* p 11 and 12 and Adeed Dawisha, "Requiem for Arab Nationalism", *Middle East Quarterly*, 10:1 (2003) p 119.

Britain's informal empire was therefore, under increasing strain during this period by economic pressure at home, an overly extended military and compounded by growing resentment of its presence by the masses.

Informational. In current British strategic theory, information is considered to underpin the other three elements (economic, military and diplomatic).³⁹⁵ Between 1945 and 1959, successive British governments certainly considered they could use this instrument in order to maintain their privileged position in the Middle East. The investment in a tutorial role expressed by many colonial officials on the ground, point to the consideration that the cost was worthwhile if influence was maintained through either continued possession or independence, which guaranteed British interests. Overt propaganda aimed to explain Britain's role as protecting the region, either from the Soviet Union or other Arab states and sell the continued presence. Covert propaganda sought a similar aim but obviously the means were different. As well as these activities, the gathering of intelligence provided officials and ministers with a unique perspective from which to form policy and strategy.

As well as propaganda and intelligence, the information element of power encompasses the ability to generate influence and prestige. Given the growing constraints on the other instruments of power, the drive to remain in the Middle East was not simply about British interests of oil and bases.³⁹⁶ Clement Attlee's plan to withdraw from the region and rely on normal diplomatic and economic relations as per any other country, were so forcefully rebuffed by Ernest Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff because retention of the Middle East was so interlinked with Britain's global role as a great power. If the instruments are considered as an equation, then the economic benefits of the region, plus the military forces required to secure them, plus the diplomatic relationships were equal to the influence that Britain gained from them. This meant that retaining a presence visibly demonstrated Britain's global role and its deserved great power status. With the growth in Arab resentment and the fragility of the British economy, the maintenance of prestige that the Middle East gave was however, in direct competition with the effort required to stay.

However successful Britain's employment of informal relationships was, there remained an inherent imbalance in these collaborations. What was said and what was done were different as this example from the Commander of the Arab Legion, John Bagot Glubb

³⁹⁵ RCDS, *Getting Strategy Right (Enough)* p 31.

³⁹⁶ Mawby *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 5.

(Pasha) in 1945 illustrates: “We must bind them to us by their need for protection, and by our constantly friendly, helpful and constructive attitude...our motto should be discussion not dictation”.³⁹⁷ Such statements were based on using pro-British nationalism, channelling it into the establishment or reforming of political structures in harmony with British interests. Of course, states act in their own interests but the say-do gap in Britain’s information strategy which underpinned the legitimising and continuation of informal empire in the Middle East opened the way for accused of hypocrisy by its enemies and the important relationships with its Arab interlocutors damaged, thereby harming Britain’s interests.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, informal authority was increasingly under strain and the Suez crisis and revolution in Iraq would see it effectively wither away.³⁹⁸ What is significant is that between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s British officials still saw control in the two remaining colonies (Cyprus and Aden) and the maintenance of influence across the Middle East as essential. Even after the withdrawal of forces from the Gulf (where they had been welcome and there was no demand to leave), there was still significant military, diplomatic and economic investment in Oman (and elsewhere). The maintenance of influence was an investment not simply in ‘empire on the cheap’ but as a way of underpinning the other instruments of power and a means to guarantee Britain’s continuing status. Such a calculation helps to explain why Britain sought to remain in Southern Arabia, even after having formally withdrawn.

President Nasser’s Vision

In 1955 Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser successfully proclaimed himself the leader of the Arab world, after he was treated as such during the first Afro-Asian conference (held in Indonesia) in April that year. For over a decade President Nasser guided a struggle across the Middle East against imperial rule and the state of Israel. His personal charm and ideological twist on pan Arab nationalism put him at the forefront of events in which Britain was forced out of the regional hinterland to peripheral bases in Cyprus and Aden. These events are important because they shape Britain’s decision making in choosing Aden as a base, which in turn is the backdrop to the campaign in

³⁹⁷ TNA, FO 371/52310/E3135, Shaw to Hall 18th August 194, enclosing memorandum by Brigadier JB Glubb, 1st July 1945. Quoted in Vaughan, *The Failure of American and Britain Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957* p 161.

³⁹⁸ Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* p15.

Dhofar. The 1950s and 60s saw an Anglo-Egyptian conflict play out over competing visions of the Middle East. Britain's vision was the continuation of informal empire, rebranded but essentially the same as it always had been. Nasser's vision was altogether different therein, challenging British objectives to remain a great power. That he was largely successful (until military defeat in 1967 Arab-Israel War and the Egyptian-Yemen conflict effectively halted it) was due to Nasser's offer of a new future in which ordinary Arabs were free of outside influences, which built on pre-existing social conditions in which the British offer of more of the same was incompatible. That Britain's policy failed to adapt to these new conditions was a monumental mistake.

President Nasser writings in *The Philosophy of Revolution* did not consider Arab nationalism in the same serious and dogmatic way as authors such as Sati al-Husri had. Instead in his doctrine the focus was on Egypt being at the centre of three circles of influence; one Arab, one African and one Islamic.³⁹⁹ In terms of Nasser's Arab nationalist philosophy, it is nicely summed up as "preaching a vague but stirring creed of anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, social justice and Cold War non-alignment".⁴⁰⁰ In particular Nasser wrapped up Britain's mandate in Palestine, with the failure of the Arab states to successfully unite and prevent the establishment of a Jewish state.⁴⁰¹ If Britain had not been imperially involved in the region, then there would be no Jewish state. This is an important insight because although Nasser is often painted as a diehard Arab nationalist, his conception was to see it as the way of achieving his overall goal of removing Britain from the Middle East through his leadership of the Arab world. This vision for the future of the Middle East directly challenged British objectives, converging as it did on Britain's national interest in maintaining its position in the region.

The Egyptian leadership appeared to gain an early advantage over Britain when in 1954, after nearly a decade of intense negotiations, the two countries signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The treaty agreed a phased withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone Base, where the presence of thousands of troops had been a statement on British power in the Middle East. The rationale for the stationing of British troops in the Canal Zone had, however, become redundant. The previous notion of having to fight the USSR in a general

³⁹⁹ Jamal Abd al-Nasir (Gamal Abdel-Nasser), *The Philosophy of Revolution* (New York: Economica Books, 1959) p 53-56 and 71-73.

⁴⁰⁰ Salim Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East" in Richard H Immerman and Petra Goedde (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p 250.

⁴⁰¹ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 30.

war had become less likely and the previous 'outer ring' military strategy with the Egyptian base at its heart was revised to one of an 'inner ring' that contained the Soviets on their frontiers using the so called Northern-Tier of Turkey, Iraq and later Iran and Pakistan. Britain's overall objective of retaining its influence in the Middle East was preserved and actually strengthened when its close allies in Iraq signed a defence pact with Turkey in 1955. The Hashemites in Iraq were the archetype traditional elite that Britain had founded its informal empire on. The Baghdad Pact of first Iraq and Turkey, with Pakistan and Britain joining in April the same year, offered a continuation of British influence through this regional defence organisation.

President Nasser reacted to these diplomatic developments with the strongest possible criticism, digressing as they did from his regional ambition and increasing his rivalry with Iraq, who he now viewed a competitor for leadership of the Arab world. The victory he appeared to have gained from removing the British from the Suez Canal base now appeared stunted, as the Baghdad Pact continued British influence in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, potentially isolating Egypt. To counter such influence, Nasser began making use of a powerful propaganda system through Radio Cairo and The Voice of the Arabs station.⁴⁰² Nasser was able to dominate the information space, broadcasting his Arab nationalist messages "like no other...Arab leader before" to millions of avid listeners.⁴⁰³

The ability for President Nasser to transmit his vision of Arab nationalism was monumentally increased by the availability of radio broadcast. Nasser was already a persuasive orator but the advent of affordable and portable radio receivers meant his broadcasts could now reach huge new audiences across the Middle East. By 1960 Egypt would rank as the world's sixth international broadcaster, based on weekly outputs.⁴⁰⁴ In practice this meant that previously inaccessible parts of the region could be influenced, including Southern Arabia. Whilst people in Yemen might still listen to the BBC regional service for news, they listened to *Voice of the Arabs* "for excitement".⁴⁰⁵ This meant that the British were now competing with Egyptian political warfare that had a cultural sway that theirs lacked. The Arab nationalist messages and anti-imperialist language delivered by

⁴⁰² Michael Doran, *Ike's Gamble: America's Rise to Dominance in the Middle East* (London: Free Press, 2016) p 83 and James Barr, *Lords of the Desert: Britain's Struggle with America to Dominate the Middle East* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2018) p 184-185.

⁴⁰³ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* p 147.

⁴⁰⁴ Douglas Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993) p 35.

⁴⁰⁵ Quoted from an interview with a Yemeni national recalling the mid-1950s in Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2010) p 60.

radio broadcast therefore directly challenged Britain's position in the Middle East. By the mid-1950s, Egyptian broadcasting was projecting a narrative of the "struggle against Western Imperialism" and their Arab "lackeys" to its audience.⁴⁰⁶

The British counter to Radio Cairo was effectively in two parts. The first was the overt services provided by the BBC's Arabic Service, whilst the second was the supposedly unattributable Near East Broadcasting Station or *Sharq al-Adna*, established by SOE in 1941. The BBC services were deliberately objective, whilst from the very beginning, *Sharq al-Adna* was able to present its own spin on events.⁴⁰⁷ However "few people who listened to *Sharq al-Adna* were in any doubt that there was a British hand in it."⁴⁰⁸ The station was later labelled as a "dangerous imperialist agitator" by the Egyptians and its Government affiliation effectively "blown".⁴⁰⁹ The removal of *Sharq al-Adna* as a platform for British political warfare was a significant blow. Subsequent plans for broadcast facilities to be set up in Aden, Muscat, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain were ultimately rejected due to cost.⁴¹⁰ These events significantly limited the ways that British political warfare could effectively counter Nasserite Arab nationalism at the very moment that Egyptian propaganda was building up.

The Egyptian President intensified his propaganda campaign yet further denouncing "Anglo-Arab collaboration as the conspiracy of devils and traitors" and squarely aiming to separated Britain from her allies.⁴¹¹ Through his presentation of the continuing Arab-Israel conflict as the result of British machinations and the Baghdad Pact as an extension of colonialism, Nasser split the Arab world. Further he challenged British and French imperialism by supporting insurgents in Algeria and Kenya. He also negotiated for the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who were happy to oblige, as by siding against Britain's allies, Iraq and Jordan, they were frustrating their long-term adversaries in the Hashemite Kingdoms. Nasser's radio propaganda soon hit home with Jordan declining to join the Baghdad Pact following major riots encouraged by Egyptian stations in autumn 1955. This decision and the dismissal of the British commander of the Jordanian Armed

⁴⁰⁶ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Summary of World Broadcasts: Part IV, The Arab World, Israel, Greece, Turkey, Iran, 12 January 1954.

⁴⁰⁷ TNA, FO 898/113 Memorandum Middle East and Balkans. Activities of Directorate of Special Propaganda, 10 April 1942.

⁴⁰⁸ Partner, *Arab Voices* p 92.

⁴⁰⁹ TNA, FO 1110/947 Middle East, Broadcasting to the Middle East, undated.

⁴¹⁰ TNA, FO 1110/1067 Report Hopson, 27 March 1958.

⁴¹¹ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p 210.

Forces, General John Glubb, were all viewed as part of a deliberate strategy to expel British influence from the Middle East and ultimately “kick us out of it all”.⁴¹²

The events in Jordan vividly illustrate the competing objectives of Egypt and Britain in the Middle East by the mid-1950s. For Britain, Nasser’s reaction to the Baghdad Pact directly countered its objective of remaining a great power, striking as it did at its informal imperial relationships with traditional Arab elites. Nasser’s use of radio to spread his compelling narrative of Arab nationalism deliberately undermined these relationships. This shows a misalignment of Britain’s ends, ways and means because the objective of retaining a demonstrable global role, through its informal empire in the Middle East was now threatened and it did not have the means to effectively counter this. Nasser’s message, with his reinterpretation of Arab nationalism, one in which foreign influences were removed, hit directly at Britain’s way of operating in the Middle East. Any British propaganda was highly unlikely to change the behaviour of a target audience outside of its supporters and offered little if anything to counter Nasser’s narrative. Britain needed to find a way of preserving its position with local allies, whilst fixing Nasser.

The hardening of the British Government to Nasser came as a result of the failure by early 1956 of a joint Anglo-American strategy attempting to find a permanent settlement in the Middle East. ‘Plan Alpha’ was designed to end the Arab-Israel dispute through territorial concessions on both sides and the resettlement of approximately 75,000 Palestine refugees. Alpha, begun in early 1955, offered little to Nasser but by acting as the primary Arab partner to the deal it did support his narrative of leading the Arab world in the longer term.⁴¹³ The resounding rebuff of Alpha by both the Egyptian’s and Israeli’s and President Nasser’s ‘Czech’ arms deal of September 1955 revolutionised the situation. Nasser’s decision to buy weapons from the ‘Czechs’ (actually the Soviet Union) fundamentally altered the balance of power in the region and introduced the Soviet Union into the Middle East.⁴¹⁴ The budding relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union “empowered” President Nasser further and in Southern Arabia the two countries interests would coalesce in supporting the anti-British actions of Yemen in the 1960s.⁴¹⁵ The immediate

⁴¹² Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Decent to Suez* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986) p 327.

⁴¹³ Scott Lucas and Ray Takeyh, “Alliance and Balance: The Anglo-American Relationship and Egyptian Nationalism 1950-57” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 7:3 (1996) p 642-643.

⁴¹⁴ TNA, FO 371/118676, Soviet Influence and Penetration in Africa, February 1956 and Roger Louis, “The Dissolution of the British Empire” in Brown and Wm Roger. Louis (Ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* p 342.

⁴¹⁵ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser’s Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) p 72.

result was the collapse of American negotiations under 'Project Gamma', which altered American attitudes towards Nasser. Previously the American's had viewed President Nasser as an asset in the global Cold War struggle. Nasser's actions now made him a liability to the US pursuit of an Arab block against the USSR. Anglo-American measures, codenamed 'Omega' were planned as a way to destabilise Nasser but ultimately bring him back in line with the US sphere. For the Britain Government however, Nasser's consistent provocation since 1954 demonstrated that his vision of the Middle East now represented a clear threat to their position in the region.

The Suez Crisis and its Outcomes for Britain's Position in the Middle East

The different objectives of the British and American Governments in the Middle East by 1956 are no better illustrated than through the events of the Suez crisis. In July 1956 the US and Britain withdrew the offer of a loan to finance the Aswan Dam, largely due to Nasser's recognition of Communist China.⁴¹⁶ The project was at the centre of Nasser's economic plan for Egypt and in response to Anglo-American actions, he nationalised the Suez Canal. What followed has become the well know saga of 'Suez' now a byword for diplomatic duplicity, ministerial incompetence and ultimately national humiliation. There is a more complicated story which was rooted in the unachievable objectives of Britain to remain a truly global power with the ways and means available. Beyond the Middle East, Britain was faced with insurgency in Cyprus, Malaya and Kenya. Furthermore, it faced dealing with political changes in a number of different parts of its imperial possessions, including complicated transition to self-government. It was also facing difficulty with maintaining military forces in Germany due to spiralling costs and the strengthening of economic ties between European countries that would culminate in the European Economic Community. The Trans-Atlantic relationship was also under strain over trade and, specifically in the Middle East, an attitude that was described by the Foreign Secretary as "a mixture of anti-colonialism and oil tycoonery".⁴¹⁷ The difficulty of balancing British interests through the concept of three concentric circles was becoming ever more strained by real world events.

For Britain, the Suez Canal was the 'jugular vein' of empire. The Canal was not simply a strategic waterway but its construction and part ownership by Britain was a demonstration

⁴¹⁶ Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991) p 224 and 243-4.

⁴¹⁷ Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Personal Account* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) p78.

of its status. Although Britain was not a superpower it held considerable global influence and anything that diminished that prestige needed to be resisted. Given the multiple threats to the three circles of British national interests, a demonstration of its influence was required. The decision to act against President Nasser was taken in Cabinet on 27 July 1956 with the two aims being to regain control of the Suez Canal, by force if necessary, and to remove Nasser. These objectives however, whilst clear, could not be achieved with the instruments of British power – the ends could not be met by the ways and means available. To understand this a review of the four instruments of power available to Britain is useful. Economic prospects were gloomy, Britain was in a period of austerity with cuts across departments to save £100 million in 1956 alone. Britain's military forces were stretched across the world, with unavoidable decisions on which expensive equipment programmes could be afforded coming down on the side of high-end conventional capabilities. This limited troops for low intensity conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, where the withdrawal from the Canal Zone base meant a reliance on the strategic reserve mainly based in the UK. Diplomatically, Britain was also insecure with the Prime Minister (Anthony Eden) having invested much of his legendary statesmanship in building a relationship with Nasser. Now it and the attempts to broker a lasting Arab-Israel peace had come to nothing. The Baghdad Pact was in place but Britain's allies were assailed by Nasser's hostile propaganda and its influence appeared diminished. All Britain's options looked equally unpalatable.⁴¹⁸ The Prime Minister was even assailed from the Suez group within his own party who wanted him to take a tough line on Nasser.

Secret intelligence could aid British decision making but, like its military, Britain's intelligence resources were spread thin. The intelligence community's focus was on combating the USSR, with efforts made to understand its intentions and capabilities globally, including the Middle East. Even with limited resources the Joint Intelligence Committee (as the focal point of the intelligence community) produced "clear and balanced" assessments of the threat to British interest before and during the Suez crisis.⁴¹⁹ These reports were ignored by the most senior members of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister. They were convinced that President Nasser's doctrine and public statements pointed to him directly threatening Britain's position in the Middle East. This interpretation coloured influential policy makers minds and meant that any evidence that countered their

⁴¹⁸ Gill Bennett, *Six Moments of Crisis: Inside British Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p 44.

⁴¹⁹ Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee Volume 1* p 368.

view was discounted.⁴²⁰ In their minds, Nasser posed such a threat that he must be removed, by force if necessary. An issue of the machinery of government was that policy makers could choose to ignore intelligence assessment if they wished. This problem would occur later in South Arabia, as the frame of anti-Nasser thinking continued to influence British decision makers during that campaign.

What alternatives existed beyond military action then? Intelligence reporting had identified a range of exiles who might be able to lead a new Egyptian government but a change of regime was unlikely without outside assistance by the US. Any change of direction in Anglo-American strategy was almost certain to be slow because of the upcoming Presidential elections on which President Eisenhower was focused. In any case, the President had already warned against military action and unless Egyptian nationalisation and administration was proven unjust then nothing could be done in the immediate future. In order to overcome US resistance, the Prime Minister seized the opportunity to secretly collaborate with the French and Israeli governments and hatch an elaborate plan. This would use an attack by Israel against Egypt as the rationale for Britain and France to intervene separating the two sides and retaking control of the Canal in the process.

Lack of military capability in the region and political intrigue, led to several major revisions to the military plan, which delayed its implementation until late October 1956. Had British and French military action been conducted with “more daring”, then perhaps the operation would have succeeded.⁴²¹ However, although military policy had identified the Middle East as a region where limited war might well need to be waged, economic considerations had constrained military expenditure in the area. The Suez crisis “demonstrated the extent of Britain’s negligence” in that its objective of remaining a great power, encapsulated in the balancing the three rings of foreign policy was not achievable because its economy could not pay for everything, nor could it influence individual circles if its bluff was called.⁴²² There was only one contingency plan of a conventional nature for the Middle East in 1956, which was for the defence of Jordan in the event of an Israeli attack – Operation Cordage. Coupled with the withdrawal of forces from the Canal Zone base, British military planners “could only improvise an assault” at Suez given the lack of forces available for use in the

⁴²⁰ Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray, 2002) p 133.

⁴²¹ Louis, “The Dissolution of the British Empire” p 342.

⁴²² Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat From East of Suez* p 23.

theatre in October.⁴²³ Such contradiction in Britain's strategy in the region showed how overstretched it was and what limited options were available at a time of crisis, ultimately significantly damaging British prestige.

The lack of British capacity and capability dealing with the Egyptian threat is neatly encapsulated by the fascial political warfare campaign hatched to explain British actions and attract local audiences. The slow-paced military build-up could have been used to organise an effective understanding of the target audience, developing a narrative explaining British actions and countering Nasser's messaging. Instead, the secrecy of the planning, driven by the need to allow the diplomatic façade to play out in order to hide the collusion with Israel, meant that the political warfare plan was only activated at a late stage.⁴²⁴ British attempts "to persuade domestic and international opinion of the justification of the use of force against Egypt" was delivered almost exclusively via grey and black radio stations.⁴²⁵ The main station was the recently "rechristened" Voice of Britain, previously known as the Near East Broadcasting Station and identified as pro-British.⁴²⁶ The renaming of a known British affiliated radio station was hardly ideal but demonstrates the limitations that were imposed on Britain's tools in the region. The use of such a station provided no cover for what was clearly a British Government mouthpiece. The Voice of Britain was controlled by Brigadier Bernard Ferguson who had fought with the Chindits during the Second World War but who had no qualifications to run a psychological warfare campaign. The radio station broadcast from Cyprus, having failed to recruit any Egyptian expatriates to work on it, employed Palestinian refugees. When these new broadcasters learnt what they were expected to produce they used the supposedly un-attributable radio station to launch sympathetic messages to the Arab audience explaining that the station was a British propaganda tool. It was later identified that the Egyptian audience presumed the speakers to be Jewish from their accents, thus denying the broadcasts credibility anyway. Many of the staff including the director resigned and those that remained attempted to sabotage the station which ultimately resulted in three employees being confined to their quarters and a "small party of infantrymen...sent to remind the staff which side they were on".⁴²⁷ Such a fascial series of

⁴²³ Anthony Gorst and Scott Lucas, "Suez 1956: Strategy and the Diplomatic Process" *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 11:4 (1988) p 397-398.

⁴²⁴ Vaughan, *The Failure of American and Britain Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957* p 217.

⁴²⁵ Shaw, *Eden Suez and the Mass Media* p 2.

⁴²⁶ Rawnsley, "Overt and Covert" p 506.

⁴²⁷ Dorril, *MI6* p 643.

events hardly bode well for the delivery of effective broadcasts to alter the target audience's comprehension of events and bring them onside with British actions.

Anthony Eden's hidden hand during the Suez crisis almost certainly contributed to the misalignment of British policy and strategy at Suez but the political warfare campaign exposed particularly worrying conclusions. The importance of effective psychological warfare was noted in the post operational analysis as a vital component of any operation but its execution during the Suez crisis was ineffective. As a result, "the benefits to be derived from psychological warfare were...lost during Operation Musketeer."⁴²⁸ This evaluation is possibly too generous in that no propaganda could explain Eden's actions, on the one hand publicly declaring a diplomatic course to the Egyptian nationalisation of the canal, whilst clandestinely preparing a military operation to ultimately topple Nasser. Beyond the comedic elements of Brigadier Ferguson's enterprise, practical aspects of psychological warfare were missing. The human and signals intelligence disciplines were inadequately resourced and targeted to deliver the type of material that could have allowed for the segmentation of different groups and craft specific messages. Lacking an insight into its audience the British "broadcasts simply ignored Arab sensitivities and launched an all-out attack on Nasser".⁴²⁹ There was also no attempt to measure the impact of British propaganda on the target audience. Fundamentally the British government should have anticipated the issues of attempting to use propaganda to prop up misguided political actions from the Drogheda Committee report of 1953. This stated:

"Propaganda is no substitute for policy; nor should it be regarded as a substitute for military strength, economic efficiency or financial stability. Propaganda may disguise weakness, but the assertion of strength will deceive nobody unless the strength is there".⁴³⁰

No amount of British propaganda, even if had been better directed, could have sold Eden's plan to an audience even though the execution of the psychological warfare activities was particularly amateurish.

The immediate US reaction to British and French military actions was to distance themselves politically and refuse to assist Britain economically when there was a run on

⁴²⁸ TNA, DEFE 6/43/142 General Keightley's Despatch on the operations in the Eastern Mediterranean November/December 1956, Part II.

⁴²⁹ Rawnsley, "Overt and Covert" p 517.

⁴³⁰ Quoted in Vaughan, *The Failure of American and Britain Propaganda in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957* p 222.

the pound. With fears of bankruptcy, Britain and France withdrew their forces from Suez. The debate on the motivation for Eisenhower's actions is contested but "reflected at least in part the greater priority that which the United States gave to the Cold War confrontation".⁴³¹ Britain's overall aim of retaining its position of influence in the Middle East and therein its recognition of the threat from Arab nationalism was viewed as counter to this US objective. The inability to bring the Americans round to its way of thinking, perhaps, shows the imbalance and lack of influence in the Anglo-American relationship at this time⁴³² It definitely demonstrates the issues around viewing events in the Middle East through a Cold War lens that effected American *and* British decision making. In the case of the UK, the Cold War and Britain's assumption of great power status became linked in the Middle East, necessitating the retention of influence and prestige. At the same time the global containment of the Soviet Union required for Britain, the spreading of limited resources too thinly across different theatres. As such Britain's ends ways and means can again be seen to be out of kilter. Given that Egypt was the greatest threat to Britain's objectives, British strategy should have reflected ways to successfully neutralise it. Instead, the Suez crisis appeared to show Britain as being unable to defend its Middle Eastern interests and President Nasser in the assent.

1956 had been a terrible year for Britain policy and strategy in the Middle East. The removal of Glubb Pasha as head of the Jordanian Armed Forces heightened fears that Britain was losing influence with its Arab interlocutors. Suez diminished Britain's position in the region to the point that it was effectively removed from the Arab heartland of Egypt, Syria and Iraq. This shattering of British prestige and reputation in the Arab world led to the decision to move to the periphery by basing troops in Cyprus and Aden. Its retort to the military instrument and the lack of a decisive result from Suez show how Britain's instruments of power had become unbalanced. By wanting to maintain influence across the three circles and retain a great power player, Britain's economic lever was over stretched and its military power was too thinly spread across too many areas to provide a rapid knockout blow at Suez. Its diplomacy was linked to an unpopular system which was hard to sell beyond its traditional allies and therefore its information strategy was overmatch by Nasser's alternative and more attractive (to the majority) vision for the future of the Middle East. Nasser and his brand of Arab nationalism was in the assent and

⁴³¹ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 34.

⁴³² The most comprehensive analysis of Anglo-American relations before and during the Suez crisis can be found in Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991).

British influence declining. Its concept of sustaining its influence through the Baghdad Pact had not foreseen the extent of Nasser's reaction to its establishment. The attempt to introduce Jordan into the Pact was frustrated by Nasser and Egyptian-Iraq rivalry increased to the point of an Arab Cold War. The resulting split of Arab states between those that supported Nasser and his vision for the future and Britain's remaining heartland ally and Baghdad Pact member, Iraq brought a furious propaganda response. Now Britain appeared unable to defend its regional allies as well as its interests.

The bloody revolution in Iraq in July 1958 which destroyed the monarchy that Britain had established sent shockwaves across the British establishment. The King had recently toured the United Kingdom and the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Said, was a staunch British ally, who had fought with Lawrence of Arabia. Britain's diminished ability to protect its regional ally spoke volumes for how far British influence had been removed. The popularity of the military coup founded, at least initially, on Arab nationalist principles and was yet another mark of how unpopular rule by a narrow conservative elite had become. After the January 1957 declaration by President Eisenhower that he would help any country in the Middle East threatened by Communism, Lebanon appalled to the Americans for assistance because of civil unrest following the Iraq revolution. Although damaged by Suez Anglo-American relations were quickly re-established and did not prevent a level of cooperation in the Levant when, Jordan fearing similar unrest to that in Lebanon, requested British assistance. However, Jordan had ended its defence treaty with the UK in 1957 and never joined a western sponsored regional security pact, showing there were now limits to its relationship with Britain. The Arab Cold War continued as Nasser's popularity increased in line with his expansionist aims. This bought the Egyptian President into conflict with Saudi Arabia and led, in time, to aligning of interests between the Kingdom and the UK. This would see the two support royalist forces against a Nasserite inspired Yemen Arab Republic from 1962 onwards.

British strategy required revision in light of the Suez crisis and the Iraq Revolution. The removal of the entire Hashemite dynasty of Iraq by the coup left Britain without its major Arab ally. Necessity forced Harold Macmillan into a particularly "cold bloody" approach to the new Iraqi government in order to establish a relationship with this regime and counter what was now the United Arab Republic (UAR).⁴³³ Although Syria left the pact in 1961

⁴³³ The UAR was a union between Egypt and Syria established in February 1958. Nigel Ashton, *False Prophets* p 68.

Egypt continued to be known as the UAR until 1971. The Prime Ministers new strategy was also needed to secure Britain's position in Kuwait and continued access to its oil reserves. Gone were the informal relationships in the Arab heartland, replaced with states that were anti British or did not look outright to Britain for their protection to avoid Nasserite calls of being an imperial lackey. The 1957 Defence White Paper provided the framework for this revision with a scaled down sphere of influence in the Middle East. The three circles of Britain's overseas interests overall remained but outside of the European and American circles, three key geographic areas were identified: Singapore in the Far East, Kenya in Africa and Aden and its Protectorates in the Middle East.

The Only Tool in the Box: Political Warfare and the Road to Conflict in Southern Arabia

In Southern Arabia Britain was already countering Arab enemies to its interests when Aden was threatened by Yemen in 1956, as well as dealing with an insurgent force in Oman in 1957. The double blows of Suez and the new Iraqi regimes withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact in March 1959 necessitated a reappraisal of Britain's position in the Middle East. The Suez crisis in particular left a "deeper mark on [the British]".⁴³⁴ This affected British policy and strategy making and would impact the conduct of the campaigns in South Arabia and Oman. The events of 1956-59 demonstrated that British power now had limits and it could "no longer threaten or dominate" as it had once done.⁴³⁵ President Nasser's Arab nationalism had been ably projected by his propaganda machine and by the early 1960s was viewed by IRD as more of a threat to British interests in the region than Communism.⁴³⁶ A fixation on the Egyptian President's role in every action would come to colour British policy and strategy in South Arabia during the early 1960s.⁴³⁷ Although having failed to support the operation at Suez or effectively counter Nasserite propaganda, the methods of political warfare would become more rather than less important in that campaign. This was even though issues such as successfully exploiting intelligence for political warfare and the quantifying of its effect were not reformed as a result of Suez. Political warfare was now one of the few ways that Britain could strike back against hostile Arab nationalism. In the future the emphasis would be on "unattributable publicity" as

⁴³⁴ TNA, CO 1015/2185 Johnston to Stevens, 16 March 1961.

⁴³⁵ TNA, FO 953/1853 Information Policy for the Middle East, 7 November 1957.

⁴³⁶ TNA, FO 1110/1543 Reddaway to Barclay, 29 December 1962.

⁴³⁷ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 78.

Britain attempted to covertly shape the information environment to its favour in Southern Arabia.⁴³⁸

When Aden was selected as the base for Britain's military headquarters in the Middle East, it is intriguing to imagine what lessons British decision makers would have drawn from recent experiences. Harold Macmillan (Prime Minister from 1957) visited Anthony Eden in March 1958. Conversation turned to the Suez crisis with Eden stating that "[i]f the Americans had helped us, the history of the Middle East wd. [would] have been changed. Now, I fear, Nasser,...will achieve his Great Empire [and] it may take war to dislodge him."⁴³⁹ Macmillan appears to have agreed with Eden's sentiments when he wrote the next day, in the "Middle East, esp[ecially] Iraq; Cyprus; - on all these the [A]mericans want our help. (since the Suez tragedy) Nasser [and] extremists are everywhere."⁴⁴⁰ These diary entry points to several possible themes in Macmillan's concept of the problems facing Britain. Firstly, that the Prime Minister recognised the competitive element in relations with the US in the Middle East and that second, Nasser was still a threat to British interests and military action might be required to counter him. Considering what assumptions may be drawn from these conclusions, it appears that Macmillan did not recognise that British strategy was one of simply "clinging to colonial power".⁴⁴¹ The alternative of full-blown retreat to "a sort of poor man's Sweden", bowing to the Soviets (and Americans) and surrendering vital economic and strategic interests was not feasible.⁴⁴² Where action was required, it would now need to be limited in scope (because of Suez) but would remain risky. Tough decisions needed to be taken on departmental spending and how Britain's remaining imperial assets should be managed. The Prime Minister stated, "unless some reduction can be made in the total burden..., it will be very difficult to hold the pound...If we lose the pound, we lose everything".⁴⁴³ This sentiment

⁴³⁸ TNA, FO 1110/1631 IRD notes on British Policy Towards President Nasser, 'Nasserism' and Arab Nationalism, 3 May 1963.

⁴³⁹ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MS Macmillan d 31 second series of diaries February 1957 – October 1963, 15 March 1958 folios 41.

⁴⁴⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MS Macmillan d 31 second series of diaries February 1957 – October 1963, 16 March 1958 folio 42.

⁴⁴¹ Michel J Cohen, *Strategy and Politics in the Middle East 1954-1960* (London: Routledge, 2012) p 219.

⁴⁴² TNA, CO 1055/167, Johnston to Sandys, 16 July 1963.

⁴⁴³ Horne, *Macmillan* p 50. See also Stephen Blackwell, "Pursuing Nasser: The Macmillan Government and the Management of British Policy Towards the Middle East Cold War, 1957-63" *Cold War History* 4:3 (2004) p 101 and Tony Hopkins, "Macmillan's Audit of Empire, 1957" in Peter Clarke and Clive Tredbilcock (Eds) *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

can be seen in the approach to negotiating for the transition of some British imperial possessions in Africa and Asia thus reducing overall costs.⁴⁴⁴

International power and economic strength are inextricably linked and by 1959 Britain's global role still brought not only material interests (the biggest being trade) but also prestige and with it influence or soft power.⁴⁴⁵ The cross departmental *Future Policy Study* advising how British policy should adapt to the challenges of the next decade, emphasised that a strong currency was vital if the Government wished to continue its global role.⁴⁴⁶ Its importance for the historian is in its detailed analysis of British official thinking at a time of significant change.⁴⁴⁷ The study recognised that a balance between commitments and economics was vital and its cross-government approach looked to bring together the necessary elements for British security and its continuing influence over the next decade.⁴⁴⁸ Continued access to Middle Eastern oil contributed to British security in two ways: first, Britain's advantageous control or influence in Southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf meant that oil was purchased and refined at preferential rates easing the balance of payments; secondly, countries such as Kuwait sold oil in sterling, which eased the pressure on London's reserve of Dollars. Around sixty per cent of Britain's oil needs were met from the region and this dependency was likely to increase making the continued flow a vital national interest.⁴⁴⁹ In order to protect its interests ministers and officials would devote significant effort to devising ways to either maintain the status quo or preserving its influence. The creation of a federal system of government would be a significant part of this strategy. It was hampered in its efforts by the increasing politicisation of Aden and the Protectorates. Political warfare offered a useful way to counter the hostile propaganda of President Nasser towards Britain's allies in South Arabia. The seizure of neighbouring Yemen by Arab nationalists would revolutionise the situation, as Egyptian forces and supplies would directly threaten Britain's fledgling Federation.

For the British Government the Middle East remained different to other areas of the world because the country's economic interests were tied to protecting still friendly rulers. The searing effect of Suez was not to force a British withdrawal from the Middle East because

⁴⁴⁴ Bennett, *Six Moments of Crisis* p 55.

⁴⁴⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 3 and 183.

⁴⁴⁶ TNA, CAB 129/100 Future Policy Study, 29 February 1960 p 40.

⁴⁴⁷ Peter Hennessy, *Distilling the Frenzy: Writing the history of one's own times* (London: Biteback, 2012) p 29.

⁴⁴⁸ TNA, CAB 129/100 Future Policy Study, 29 February 1960 p 32.

⁴⁴⁹ TNA, PREM 11/4936 Home to Macmillan, 20 September 1963.

defending access to oil supplies continued well into the 1970s during the conflict in Oman and beyond. The influence of Suez was to focus British government thinking on never being isolated and exposed again. This did not halt military action but it limited the level of force that was overtly used and likely resulted in an increasing use of covert ways and means in pursuing British interests. The *Future Policy Study* was the first comprehensive review of Britain's global policy and strategy for many years but demonstrated little change in Whitehall's view of Britain's vital interests in the Middle East.⁴⁵⁰ The change was in the ways and means to achieve them, which saw a wish to shape or influence nationalism, rather than simply oppose it.⁴⁵¹ Unlike almost anywhere else in the remaining Empire, Britain was on the advance in Aden and the Protectorates under its 'forward policy'. Suez did not change Britain's approach in either Aden or the Gulf where it continued to press territorial issues with Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi oasis. As Britain attempted to strengthen its relationships in the area, this would be where British influence could be maintained after its removal in the Arab hinterland. With Egyptian forces stationed in Yemen from 1962, Britain appeared to have an opportunity to covertly fight back against Nasser from the Aden base.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1950s Britain had relinquished its informal empire and preserved a foothold on the South Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. The apparent "dizzying speed with which British power and influence was washed away by the floodtide of Nasser's Arab nationalism" makes it easy to equate the Suez crisis as the moment when British weakness was exposed and the rot of imperial decline set in.⁴⁵² However, this does not consider the events of the previous decade which had challenged Britain's influence, nor do such accounts acknowledge the British efforts in Aden and Dhofar over the next two decades.⁴⁵³ The impact of the Second World War on Britain and particularly its economy were important factors in setting the boundaries to British actions in the region.⁴⁵⁴ The authority that had rested on military power in the interwar period was now both unaffordable and unable to be utilised in the same fashion as it had been.⁴⁵⁵ This

⁴⁵⁰ Hennessy, *Distilling The Frenzy* p 29 and 85.

⁴⁵¹ Blackwell, "Pursuing Nasser" p 94.

⁴⁵² Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* p 212.

⁴⁵³ Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and The Balance of Power in the Middle East 1952-1967* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) p 69. Simon Smith, *Ending Empire in the Middle East: Britain, the United States and post-war decolonisation, 1945-1973* (London: Routledge, 2012) p 160.

⁴⁵⁴ Bullock, *Ernest Bevin* p 49-50.

⁴⁵⁵ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51* p 17-18.

made the use of political warfare, specifically propaganda and psychological warfare, as a counter to this loss of hard power an attractive option. Attempts to continue informal empire through partnerships with friendly Arab states however, was going to be difficult considering the perception of Britain's role in establishing Israel, the growth of Arab nationalism and the lack of economic power. On one level the British were alive to changes in the Middle East but on another, they did not consider the limitations of the offer of informal empire to many people and the problems in the delivery of political warfare. There were clear limits to a strategy of influence even by the late 1950s.⁴⁵⁶

A further consequence of the Second World War was the emergence of America and the Soviet Union as global super powers. It was their rivalry that would affect British strategic decision making in the Middle East more than anywhere else.⁴⁵⁷ Such competition dictated the necessity of maintaining British bases in the region, which continued to impose economic and social restrictions on Britain and the local population. This increased pressure on policy makers, tying their hands fiscally, whilst creating tensions in Anglo-Arab relations, most notably in Egypt relating to the concentration of British forces. The Suez crisis was significant because it exposed how vulnerable to international and specifically American pressure Britain's freedom of action had become by the 1950s. This was a consequence of the intrusion of another power (the US) into the Middle East, who saw their interests through the lens of the Cold War. This US view meant that during the 1950s, American pressure was used to compel Britain to come to terms with Nasser, first in 1954 and undermined later attempts to use political and diplomatic means before the Suez crisis.

Whilst the Suez crisis was a defining event for Britain in the Middle East and damaged British prestige, its significance and the extent to which it is *the* turning point is more debatable.⁴⁵⁸ It did not destroy the will to intervene militarily, although the circumstances had to be carefully considered.⁴⁵⁹ In the aftermath of Suez a review of the benefits and costs of continued imperial possessions, stimulated the belief that retreat from empire

⁴⁵⁶ Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire" p 551.

⁴⁵⁷ Smith, *Ending Empire in the Middle East* p 159.

⁴⁵⁸ For this debate amongst historians see John Darwin, who claims that after Suez Britain abandoned "claims to manage Western interests in the Middle East". Quoted in Simon Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf* (London: Routledge, 2004) p 6. Richie Ovendale views Suez as a point in the slow transfer of power to the US. Ovendale, *Britain, The United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-1962* p 178. Keith Kyle meanwhile comments that the British were never left in complete control of Cold War strategy in the Middle East but that Suez abruptly ended it. Kyle, *Suez* p 560.

⁴⁵⁹ French, *Army, Empire & Cold War* p 242-244.

offered the opportunity to move from any overt presence towards political influence.⁴⁶⁰

Such an attempt failed in Aden where Britain was confronted “not with a clash of interests but on an incompatibility between two different visions of Middle East order”.⁴⁶¹ As such, events in Aden follow the pattern of decline, revival and fall seen in other parts of the Empire. As Britain was forced out of Palestine, Egypt and Iraq it moved to where its influence was more secure, Aden and the Gulf.

The events of the 1940s and 50s arguably taught British officials that coordinating covert and overt action, particularly propaganda, so that they were greater than the sum of their parts, was necessary if success was to be achieved. Attempts to better coordinate political warfare capabilities after Suez can be seen in the establishment of entities such as the Committee for Counter-Subversion in the Colonies (Brook Committee) in 1956 and a centralisation of psychological warfare in the military (under the DFP) and its better integration with Foreign Office operations in 1957.⁴⁶² Important for the assessment of later actions in Aden and Dhofar is recognising this change in the ways that were used to achieve Britain’s ends. Indeed, to covertly intervene was then seen as a way to prevent further scuttles (and ‘to scuttle’ had become a dirty phrase in this period).⁴⁶³ This terminology continued throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.⁴⁶⁴ A determined collection of Conservative MPs and others came together during the period, specifically to prevent further scuttling. They failed at Suez but their arguments would become more important in shaping British actions in Aden. As will be explored in the following chapter, Britain’s strategy for Aden and the Protectorates “emerged piecemeal” but with the central idea of maintaining British interests in the Middle East.⁴⁶⁵ It was felt that Britain’s interests were best served by the creation of a Federation of states, that could emerge under British tutelage and then sustain Britain’s economic, military and diplomatic interests. This desired end state being the retention of a British military presence but through treaty rights agreed with an independent (and friendly) state.⁴⁶⁶ The Federation would be influential as

⁴⁶⁰ Gordon Martell, “Decolonisation after Suez: Retreat or Rationalisation”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 46:3 (2000) p 403-417.

⁴⁶¹ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 31.

⁴⁶² Rory Cormac, “Managing Imperial Decline: “Fancy Footwork” and the Failure of Covert Action in the Colonies” and Huw Bennett, “Deception and Psychological Warfare in Britain’s Middle East Strategy, 1945-1961”. Both papers presented during *Influencing the Global South [2]: British intelligence, covert action and security assistance in a post-colonial world*, The British International History Group 29th Annual Conference 8 September 2017.

⁴⁶³ Chikara Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire: British Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in the Middle East, 1948-63* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) p 171.

⁴⁶⁴ Shuckburgh, *Decent to Suez* p 17.

⁴⁶⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 29.

⁴⁶⁶ Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* p 70.

a success story after bitter defeats elsewhere. How and why this objective in Aden failed to achieve a system where Britain could reduce upfront costs but maintain influence and prestige and the apparent success in the case of Oman, are the subject of the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter Three – Britain’s Political Warfare and Counter-Subversion in South Arabia, 1959-1967

This chapter will analyse Britain’s use of political warfare in South Arabia between 1959 and 1967. The approach to this chapter benefits from the release of the papers of the Information Research Department (IRD), particularly those between 2019 and 2021.⁴⁶⁷ These primary documents allow this chapter to build on previous scholarship but assess events through its own analytical lens. Through the files of the IRD, more information is now available on Britain’s use of propaganda and other methods used to wage political warfare and counter-subversion in South Arabia during the late 1950s and much of the 1960s. This chapter will therefore add to the scholarship on the British Government’s increased use of covert ways and means, as a substitute for not simply a reduced conventional military capability but one that was constrained by economic necessity and increasingly ill-suited to the political climate of the time and place.⁴⁶⁸

The Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP) operated at the theatre level of the political warfare campaign and its activities complemented the strategic role of the IRD.⁴⁶⁹ The files relating to psychological operations and community relations that the DFP conducted during the campaign can be combined with the new IRD files, allowing for interesting, novel and fresh insights to be drawn. This research and analysis covers an area of British operations in South Arabia that has yet to be fully unpicked. A strategy of political warfare in Southern Arabia attempted to promote British interests, counter Communism and Arab nationalism in the region, whilst offsetting the deficit in Britain's overstretched military and economic resources. Britain’s strategy was not passive and as well as countering adversary subversion, the IRD and DFP attempted to subvert opponents themselves. The range of unattributable or ‘black’ methods were more aggressive than was previously thought including systematic postal interception and forgery using international organisations as the vehicle for British political warfare. As well as changing the historical interpretations that IRD made little use of black propaganda operations, the files show disagreements over the balance to be struck between pursuing covert methods and other forms of political warfare. By studying events through the lens of political warfare, this

⁴⁶⁷ These are available through The National Archives under the file series, FCO 168.

⁴⁶⁸ Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire* and Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Sophia Dingli & Caroline Kennedy, “The Aden Pivot? British Counter-Insurgency after Aden”, *Civil Wars* 16 (2014).

⁴⁶⁹ The records are available at The National Archives under the DEFE 28 file series.

thesis can present a more nuanced understanding of the campaign. It also starts to address the overall thesis question of, why the Government plans appeared to fail in South Arabia but would succeed in Oman.

To be effective British political warfare needed to be coordinated, integrated and synchronised, but it could not “work miracles”.⁴⁷⁰ Britain would have withdrawn from its colonial responsibilities in South Arabia at some point in the late 1960s but the disordered retreat in 1967 was a result of successive Governments poor strategic management. The events of over fifty years ago therefore “remain a contested field among historians.”⁴⁷¹ Through the unpacking of events this chapter will examine the interplay of complicated decisions made over a longer term than any one Government. This approach is deliberate because by looking at events in totality this chapter can interpret how and why decisions were made in London or South Arabia. This approach shows how Government policy could evolve over time but also how opportunities were missed. This muddled approach left much to be desired from the actions of both politicians (Conservative and Labour) and Government officials. It also led to a crisis in the security of another British ally in Oman that will be investigated in chapter four.

By studying the campaign through the new information on political warfare, the dissonance in the formulation and execution of Government policy and strategy becomes apparent. The revelations from the IRD files demonstrate how political warfare means were unaligned with achieving policy after 1965, as locally driven and covert activities could not provide a solution to a Federal model that was not supported by the local population. Through a range of sources, including secret intelligence, British ministers and officials should have been able to understand the situation they faced and make informed choices and decisions.⁴⁷² The overarching problem was in the system of government that could actually encourage slow and incremental decision making. This meant that whilst the aim of withdrawing from South Arabia and the military bases East of Suez was a reasonable adjustment to the changing situation, the execution was poor. The re-examination of deliberations in Whitehall and Aden throughout the campaign, allows for not only the

⁴⁷⁰ The War Office, *Keeping the Peace* p 65.

⁴⁷¹ Clive Jones, “Humiliating Withdrawal or a Necessary Retreat? Reflections on Britain and South Arabia 50 Years on” in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds), *Britain’s Departure From Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 12.

⁴⁷² For a modern interpretation of this system see, UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), *Joint Doctrine Publication 04 Understanding* (London: MOD, 2010). One of the outputs of the investigation of recent British strategic failure – the Chilcot Review – identified that understanding is an essential component of the first of analysis any problem. MOD, *The Good Operation* (London: MOD, 2018) p 17.

investigation of political warfare activities but also illuminates the disconnect between British policy and strategy adding to the historiography of the period.

Campaigns often develop in phases and this chapter is structured to present the events through the development of British Government thinking about creating a Federation in South Arabia, the increase in violence that resulted in a declaration of emergency and the endgame of British withdrawal. Throughout these phases political warfare was a constant feature of Britain's strategy to counter subversive elements that it considered were backed by its adversaries in Egypt and Yemen. In order to understand why South Arabia mattered to Britain during this period, this chapter will also consider how Britain had come to the area in the first place.

Background to 1959

"The main task will generally be to assist the civil administration in gaining and/or retaining the co-operation of the local population... To achieve this, the psychological warfare teams can augment the means by which subversive propaganda is countered and government policy is explained."⁴⁷³

Examining how and why the British came to be involved in Southern Arabia is important because it helps to explain later events. Aden and the Protectorates were a neglected backwater of empire for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and although there was debate about the political development of the area it was never conclusively answered. Examining the political developments of the 1950s helps to illuminate British Government policy and explains the impetus for the creation of a federation. This resulted from bigger changes in Britain's global interests rather than local considerations. Delays in making a firm decision to federate the area would be a significant factor in the inability to create a successful political union in the region and had an impact on the effectiveness of political warfare.⁴⁷⁴ As with many historical events, factors were not simple nor were they straight forward and there was an interplay of complicated choices over a longer period than one government term. Political warfare is a useful way of studying these events because its activities played a part in Southern Arabia well before the start of the campaign.

⁴⁷³ TNA, DEFE 28/14 Psychological Warfare Resources, 7 July 1958.

⁴⁷⁴ Simon Smith, "Rulers and Residents: British Relations with the Aden Protectorate, 1937-59", *Middle Eastern Studies* 31:3 (1995) p 519.

Britain's interests in Aden began during the Napoleonic era and by the 1830s its deep harbour and proximity to the straits connecting the Red Sea and Indian Ocean could not be ignored by a maritime nation with interests growing on the Indian sub-continent. Mohammad Ali, Egypt's governor, had recently undertaken a successful military campaign as far south as Yemen and his claim that Aden was a part of Yemen and therein part of Egypt's sphere of influence, alarmed the British. In similar circumstances to those of a hundred and thirty years later, the British felt that only a physical presence could halt Ali's (later President Nasser's) ambitions and a force was sent by the Government of Bombay. It duly captured Aden on 19 January 1839, becoming the first territorial acquisition under Queen Victoria's reign.

In order to provide a buffer to the port of Aden, the British authorities entered into treaties with the rulers of what became the two surrounding Protectorates. Although the local rulers were clients of the colonial authorities, there was little interest or "any sort of responsibility for the peace or welfare of the Protectorate and its inhabitants".⁴⁷⁵ Aden's strategic location made it an important part of imperial communications but development beyond the city and immediate surround was a very low priority as was any expense beyond what was absolutely essential. As responsibility for the area moved from the Government of India, via the War and Foreign Offices', "[Aden] drifted uncomfortably and uncertainly in the rock strewn water of administrative reorganisation" before coming to rest under the control of the Colonial Office (CO).⁴⁷⁶ Such lack of investment and civil development was seen in many parts of Britain's empire but appears particularly stark in South Arabia. Beyond the port, territories were presided over by indigenous rulers who maintained considerable autonomy. By gaining relative control through the various sultans, emirs and sheikhs the British divested themselves of internal responsibility but gave protection to these regimes. This made reform in the twentieth century more difficult as changes in international norms and communications made Britain vulnerable to criticism of using an anachronistic system.⁴⁷⁷ Unfortunately even with its treaty relationships Britain held little agency with the local rulers, any change in these areas having to be administrated through a system of political officers similar to those on the North West Frontier of India. The Governor of Aden could therefore not simply impose his will on the rulers of the Protectorates. This complicated administrative arrangement made

⁴⁷⁵ TNA, CO 725/96/4 Minute by Reilly, 7 Feb 1949.

⁴⁷⁶ Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule 1839-1967* p 253.

⁴⁷⁷ Smith, "Rulers and Residents" p 505.

systematic development not only difficult but also expensive. Development was therefore unlikely to occur without very good reason.

Beyond cross border raiding from the Yemen, whose Iman claimed the whole of Aden and the Protectorates as his own, there was no significant threat to British rule in South Western Arabia until the middle of the twentieth century. Whilst this helps to explain why the colonial authorities did little to develop the area beyond the treaties established in the nineteenth century, it meant that when the threat emerged attempts to revise relationships were more complicated. Threats to the stability of the areas governance emerged in the twentieth century but were influenced by the British policy of the previous century. This factor can be missed if the decisions of the Macmillan, Douglas-Home and Wilson Governments are taken as the totality of events. It is highly questionable whether the Government in London ever understood the circumstances sufficiently to make sense of the situation and therefore, balance its decisions against long-term themes. Whilst the traditional pragmatism of British government decision making might make the delivery of policy more straightforward, it had its limits. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, successive governments assumed that the CO administrators in Aden would manage Britain's interests through the agency of the Protectorate rulers, therein limiting its colonial liabilities. These were reasonable assumptions in the short term, given that similar systems had worked elsewhere in the empire. In the long term this continued policy gave little thought to the Protectorates inhabitants and crucially no real thought as to how this situation could be maintained.

The established elite of Aden were a mix of British, Indian and Arabs, who dominated the top echelons of power in the city. Like the rulers in the Protectorates this group was primarily motivated by the maintenance of its position and their patronage allowed the British to maintain their presence in turn. The expansion of Aden's port and the oil refinery from the 1930s drew large numbers of migrant workers from Yemen and Somalia, which changed the dynamic of Aden's population. This influx was resented by the collaborative element of Aden's society, who began to call for self-government of the city, culminating in 1950 with the formation of a political group - the Aden Association. The British appointed Aden Legislative Council had been found to be incapable of delivering meaningful concessions from the British and therefore, their legitimacy in the eyes of local Adenis was

diminished.⁴⁷⁸ At the same time the migrant work force was also becoming discontent. Whilst the contrast in freedoms enjoyed by these migrants cannot be underestimated (Yemen was ruled by a truly medieval era Iman, who was famous for his reactionary system of government), working conditions and pay in Aden were relatively poor. In 1956 the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC) was formed to fight for improved conditions. By the late 1950s Aden had become the hub for both anti-Yemeni and anti-British opposition in Southern Arabia. The inability of the traditional elite to deliver change was given more weight as Radio Cairo began to beam in Arab nationalist rhetoric and anti-imperial propaganda. Political movements inspired by Arab nationalism merged around a vision of a unified Aden, the Protectorates and Yemen. This collection of groups increased agitation in the city through the campaign for Adenis not to vote in Legislative Council elections.⁴⁷⁹ The deteriorating political situation convinced the Governor at the time, William Luce (1956-60), that the best solution was to grant Aden full sovereignty. This was rejected by the Colonial Office who wished instead to merge Aden into its Federation of South Arabia.

The merging of Aden into the Federation is often described as the turning point in the deterioration of security in South Arabia.⁴⁸⁰ This analysis is perhaps a little limited in that it looks at events from the ultimate establishment of the Federation (in 1963), rather than the substantial twists and turns that occurred in British official thinking towards the idea.⁴⁸¹ One prominent figure throughout the debate on Federation was Sir Gerald Kennedy Nicholas Trevaskis, who served as a colonial official in South Arabia during the 1950s before being appointed High Commissioner in the 1960s. Trevaskis has been painted as difficult, intense and more recently as cognitively biased but the publication of a comprehensive memoir in 2017 paints a more sophisticated picture.⁴⁸² Trevaskis' account of his time as the Political Agent for the Western Protectorate in the 1950s records that he suggested a federation model should be implemented as a prelude to ultimate independence. This would be a staged process, much in line with decolonisation

⁴⁷⁸ Simon Smith, "Failure and Success in State Formation: British Policy Towards the Federation of South Arabia and the United Arab Emirates", *Middle Eastern Studies* 53:1 p 85.

⁴⁷⁹ John Albert Noel Brehony, "Explaining the Triumph of the National Liberation Front", *Middle Eastern Studies* 53:1 (2017) p 35.

⁴⁸⁰ Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: IB Tauris, 2011) p 10.

⁴⁸¹ Joseph Higgins, "A Federal Panacea? British Policy and the Idea of a South Arabian Federal State, 1952-63" in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds) *Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 77.

⁴⁸² Walton, *Empire of Secrets* p 319. Kennedy Trevaskis, *The Deluge: A Personal View of the End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: Radcliff Press, 2017).

elsewhere but Trevaskis wanted to stress the necessity of an all-Arab government being created prior to independence.⁴⁸³

Trevaskis' plan was built on his experience as an administrator in Ethiopia (in which he saw similarities with the characteristics of the tribal society in South Arabia) but also demonstrates the tradition of on the spot thinking required by CO officials in the field.⁴⁸⁴ Trevaskis claims that his proposal was substantially changed, most importantly in terms of the nature and makeup of the government which placed British officials in charge rather than local people.⁴⁸⁵ In Trevaskis' view this almost certainly missed an opportunity to better prepare the Protectorates and Aden for the future. In his original proposal, Trevaskis had laid out plans for development through local tutelage. Through this a younger, more representative elite could be created, making continuing influence post-independence more likely, as seen elsewhere during decolonisation.⁴⁸⁶ If the British Government had taken the decision to create a federation in the 1950s in the way Trevaskis planned, it would have had substantially more time to implement such a scheme. Trevaskis continued to suggest that federation should be used as a way to move the two Protectorates towards independence. He warned that without a clear plan, a drift in policy and strategy might occur and end in disaster for Britain.⁴⁸⁷ Throughout the late 1950s there was no bold resolution to the situation in Southern Arabia, as Trevaskis had argued for. No changes to the existing governance arrangements were made at a time of growing Arab nationalism which was projected through "untiring Egyptian Propaganda".⁴⁸⁸ This Egyptian political warfare urged the population of Aden and the Protectorates to be suspicious of Britain, whose policy continued to amount to keeping the local tribes divided in order to rule them.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸³ Trevaskis, *The Deluge*, p 3851 (e-book edition).

⁴⁸⁴ An example of this type of individual was Harold Ingrams who wrote extensively about the Eastern Protectorate. Ingrams and his wife were station in the area during the 1930s. He wrote about his experiences in *The Yemen* (London: John Murray, 1963) and *Arabia and the Isles* (London: John Murray, 1966).

⁴⁸⁵ Trevaskis, *The Deluge* p 3896 (e-book edition).

⁴⁸⁶ Smith, "Rulers and Residents" p 517-518.

⁴⁸⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MSS British Empire s 367 Box 5 (A) File 3, Papers of Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, 7 June 1956 folio 108.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid* folio 106.

⁴⁸⁹ TNA CO 1015/1212 Letter from Macmillan to Lennox-Boyd, 14 October 1955.

The Genesis of Political Warfare in South Arabia

Britain's conquest of Aden and the establishment of an informal system of rule in the surrounding Protectorates in the nineteenth century would impact political warfare activities in the 1950s and 60s. The establishment of such a system and its management through a small number of political officers who engaged with local rulers caused unforeseen issues.⁴⁹⁰ To be effective the political officer needed to develop a good relationship with the local ruler but by focusing on one group in a wider tribal structure, this resulted in British influence becoming tied to key individuals. While the system of indirect rule in the Protectorates helped to reduce Britain's liabilities in the region, it meant that the colonial authorities acted through a narrow elite. As the influence of Arab nationalism developed, the authority of local rulers in the Protectorates would be overshadowed by radical political movements who appeared to offer more to local people.⁴⁹¹ The close relationship between the local rulers made them easy targets for accusations of being "agents of imperialism".⁴⁹² This made political warfare more difficult as it was trying to gain support for a system that was already being undermined.

Individual officers could work in the Protectorates for years, establishing close bonds with key individuals and a very detailed local knowledge. Surprisingly there was no formal way for the information gleaned by political officers to be shared or analysed.⁴⁹³ This missed an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the local situation. This lack of a properly integrated system might be understandable due to costs but the inability to fuse detailed local knowledge would be particularly damaging for political warfare in South Arabia. This type of information would have been extremely useful for the proper targeting of particular segments of the population. Without it the use of propaganda and psychological warfare was less effective than they might otherwise have been.

The legacy of over a hundred years of British influence in South Arabia did not create a particularly useful basis upon which to build a successful political warfare campaign. Indeed, such a campaign when attempting to support the continuation of British policy in the 1950s and beyond started from a disadvantaged position. The legacy of the

⁴⁹⁰ Stephen Day, "Aden and the Gulf: The Reflections of a Political Officer", *Middle Eastern Studies* 53:1 (2017) p 136.

⁴⁹¹ Karl Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia: Abandoning Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1991) p 36.

⁴⁹² Smith, "Rulers and Residents" p 520.

⁴⁹³ Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 154.

nineteenth century laid the foundations for mistrust by the local population of both the British and their local interlocutors. Even so, political warfare through propaganda, psychological warfare/operations and special operations would be used in Southern Arabia so as to avoid military escalation whilst countering anti-colonial subversion.⁴⁹⁴ Successes in other campaigns, particularly Malaya, meant that the remit of psychological warfare now expanded whilst other activities like the DFP's strategic deception work was contracting.⁴⁹⁵ Overt information services, in the form of an Information Office and radio station, had been established in Aden during the mid-1950s and an Arab led Public Relations Department would follow later.⁴⁹⁶ These services were designed to encourage support for the colonial (later federal) government. British officials working in Southern Arabia believed that the local population were not susceptible to blatant propaganda.⁴⁹⁷ Military doctrine from the time, recognised the need for an effective propaganda campaign that would support British objectives. The coordination of such activities could, "only be really effective [if] it stems from the top...In these conditions it will be the most effective weapon in the hands of the government".⁴⁹⁸ The DFP had a section focused on the Middle and Far East and its manpower could increase during times of crisis. Such a crisis occurred in 1957 when Yemen received an arms shipment of T-34 tanks from the Soviet Union.

The Yemeni Government's purchase of tanks caused something of a stir amongst colonial and military officials as there were limited armoured vehicles in the area at the time. Methods such as psychological warfare were more effective when they could amplify actual successes. A propaganda film 'All in a Day's Work' which was supposed to showcase British military power was "deemed too frightening for the public" rather than showcasing strength.⁴⁹⁹ Covert methods including special operations which could give the impression of strength were considered to be of greater use.⁵⁰⁰ DFP records show that the organisation discussed deterring Yemen and convincing Adenis that the British would defend them through "dramatic manifestations" of flame throwers, dummy parachutists (meant to be interpreted by Yemenis as spies or saboteurs) and "mysterious explosions on [the] frontier".⁵⁰¹ The records provide new evidence of its relationship with other Government departments. DFP members communicated with the Secret Intelligence

⁴⁹⁴ TNA, CO 1015/1287 Supply of Soviet Weapons to Yemen, Jul 1957.

⁴⁹⁵ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand* p 504.

⁴⁹⁶ TNA, CO 1069/691 Views of Aden, the Aden Public Relations Department.

⁴⁹⁷ TNA, CO 1015/1287 Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 5 July 1957.

⁴⁹⁸ The War Office, *Keeping the Peace* p 65.

⁴⁹⁹ Bennett, "Words are cheaper than bullets" p 9.

⁵⁰⁰ TNA, CO 1015/1287 COS 55th Meeting, 9 July 1957.

⁵⁰¹ TNA, DEFE 28/13 Exclusive for DDFP (ME) from DFP, 10 July 1957.

Service (SIS) on the possibility of producing “various exploding gadgets and booby traps such as match boxes, cigarette packets [and] jam tins”.⁵⁰² It was suggested they could bear the hall-mark of Czechoslovak origin, presumably a device to tie the items to the earlier ‘Czech’ arms shipment to Egypt, again linking the threat back to Yemen and Egypt. This is important because, not only does it provide more detail on DFP connections to SIS but also the kind of support that could be requested to conduct covert action. This demonstrates how political warfare included not simply psychological warfare and propaganda but links to special operations too.

The DFP deployed two military officers and a civil servant to Aden, specifically to work on psychological warfare.⁵⁰³ The archival material explains how the DFP first became involved in South Arabia and why the DFP would be the military’s link into the coordination of covert action in South Arabia. Whilst the DFP’s requests to SIS show an ingenuity and creativity in British officials’ approach to deterrence, they also show how stretched British military power was. Dispatching armoured forces to Aden would have taken time and resources that the threat from Yemen probably did not require. On the other hand, local rulers were already identified as key to maintaining British influence and they needed to see that Britain could defend them.⁵⁰⁴ Such operations were definitely “cheaper than bullets” both financially and in escalatory terms but their use also exposed a potentially dangerous ‘say-do gap’.⁵⁰⁵ British words needed to be aligned to their actions if the rulers and local population were to be partners in the British project.

The use of political warfare during the late 1950s in South Arabia, included the deployment of propaganda, psychological warfare and special operations as ways to counter Soviet, Egyptian and Yemeni activity. A post for a DFP psychological warfare officer in the Governor’s Office was established.⁵⁰⁶ His role would be to focus on military and tactical activity with political authorities needed to disseminate any media.⁵⁰⁷ Although there was debate between the DFP and the CO over the restrictive terms of reference, by October 1957 there was general agreement that the arrangement was working well and the issue

⁵⁰² TNA, DEFE 28/13 From Group Captain PR Magrath to PH O’Hanlon, c/o Dick White, 16 July 1957.

⁵⁰³ TNA, DEFE 28/13 Proposed Headquarters Organisation for the Arabian Peninsula Command, 23 October 1957.

⁵⁰⁴ TNA, CO 1015/1287 COS 55th Meeting, 9 July 1957.

⁵⁰⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/74 HQ BFAP to Ministry of Defence London, 7 August 1958 quoted in Bennett, “Words are cheaper than bullets” p 10.

⁵⁰⁶ TNA, CO 1015/1287 Luce to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 July 1957.

⁵⁰⁷ TNA, CO 1015/1288 Memorandum on the Appointment of Psychological Warfare Office to HQ British Forces Arabian Peninsula, 29 August 1957.

did not need to be pursued further.⁵⁰⁸ The IRD also began to operate with the colonial authorities in Aden.⁵⁰⁹ The appointments and the increase in political warfare were a part of a broader attempt to pursue British activity covertly in the Middle East. As part of this the Prime Minister attended a Chiefs of Staff meeting in May 1958 to consider how to counter-subversion in the Arab world. The limited numbers of British forces in the region were noted but more concerning was the inadequate intelligence being produced, with “secret source intelligence almost non-existent”.⁵¹⁰ This dearth of intelligence likely reflected a de-prioritisation of Aden against other areas of intelligence collection and analysis but the lack of insight was already affecting the delivery of psychological warfare too. The previous year, a DFP proposal for a “special propaganda film” had been rejected as the structure was thought too confusing for the local audience and included dogs which it was thought the Arabs would most definitely not like.⁵¹¹ The tone of the criticism by the CO echoes historical analysis that argues the local population were viewed in a juvenile way by British officials.⁵¹² Both a lack of intelligence to help comprehend the situation and cognitive bias towards the local people were identified in British military doctrine from the time, as making the targeting of political warfare less effective.⁵¹³ That both were occurring did not bode well for the likely success of holding back a “tide of Egyptian and other hostile propaganda” aimed at Britain’s interests in South Arabia.⁵¹⁴

During 1958 the British Government’s Middle East policy solidified around three overriding objectives: first, protecting the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf; second, strengthen sterling through the oil trade; and third countering Soviet expansion and Egyptian subversion, particularly in South Arabia and the Persian Gulf.⁵¹⁵ Aden’s geo-strategic position on the coast of South Western Arabia meant its military garrison could intervene in West Africa or the Gulf and the troops there were a strategic reserve for the Far East. Economically the port was the third busiest in the world (after New York and Liverpool) and as Britain’s last Middle East base, it held an element of prestige as a part of a chain of British assets from Gibraltar, through Cyprus, then beyond the Arabian Sea to Hong Kong and Singapore. The increased importance of Aden was undercut by its continued rule through a traditional, British supporting elite. The ruler’s support was seen as essential by Whitehall who used

⁵⁰⁸ TNA, CO 1015/1288 Secretariat to Morgan, 16 October 1957.

⁵⁰⁹ TNA, CO 1015/1288 Rennie to Drew, 30 October 1957.

⁵¹⁰ TNA, CAB 21/2013 COS 1st Meeting, 2 May 1958.

⁵¹¹ TNA, CO 1015/1287 Morgan to Drew, 9 August and 4 September 1958.

⁵¹² Mawby, “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism” p 179.

⁵¹³ The War Office, *Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 6.

⁵¹⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/14 Isaac to DFP, 30 September 1958.

⁵¹⁵ TNA, T 234/768 British Obligations Overseas: Memorandum by the Foreign Office, 14 Apr 1958.

its traditional allies in the process of constructing the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South in 1959. Britain would retain its role as the protecting power.⁵¹⁶ If this is understandable, given that the rulers had been Britain's long-term loyalists, it also demonstrated that the colonial authorities had a limited understanding of local culture. The tribal structures of the Protectorates would make it difficult to sell the federal idea to groups of people who had lived for centuries in a very different society.⁵¹⁷ More fundamentally, by committing to the Protectorate rulers actually disrupted the traditional tribal practice of selecting its own leaders.⁵¹⁸ This meant that Britain was in effect supporting rulers who did not have the support of the local population, something that was understood by local British officials such as Trevaskis but not by Whitehall, demonstrating a lack of joined up appreciation in the planning and execution of the new policy.⁵¹⁹ The system lacked any flexibility or alternative at the moment when such ways of governing were challenged by Arab nationalism across the Middle East.

Understanding the way that the British Government decision-making process worked in attempting to secure its interests in South Arabia is important because it demonstrates a tradition in British administration – that of pragmatism in the way policy and strategy were formulated. The muddled and messy withdrawal from South Arabia is best explained as part of a trend in incremental thinking. Strain was already evident by the late 1950s, when British Government policy towards maintaining its position in Aden and the Protectorates was indirectly challenged by other colonies being granted independence and directly as the pressure of Arab nationalism and Russia and America influence grew in emerging nations. With the 'Winds of Change' already blowing through the African colonies, the British Government on one level recognised that it needed to alter its colonial relationships if it was to maintain its overall interests. With independent nations joining the UN, crucial votes would only be won if Britain maintained favourable relations with its former dependents. Using force to maintain control, would not only alienate potential allies but opened Britain up to international condemnation as had been the case during the Cyprus Emergency. If a federation was to be developed in South Arabia it needed significant political, economic and military investment beyond that envisaged through limiting colonial liabilities as had previously been the case. The threats and challenges facing Britain in the

⁵¹⁶ Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO), *Cmnd 2451: Treaty of friendship and protection between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Federation of South Arabia and supplementary treaty providing for the accession of Aden to the Federation* (London: HMSO, 1964).

⁵¹⁷ TNA, CO 1027/392 Local Intelligence Committee Radio and Press Propaganda, 6 September 1960.

⁵¹⁸ Smith, "Rulers and Residents" p 519.

⁵¹⁹ Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber* p 143.

Middle East meant there was now limited time in which to develop a sound political culture in South Arabia.

The Establishment of a Federation, 1959-1963

The movement of Britain's Headquarters Middle East to Aden in March 1961 was timely as it and military forces from the garrison were used to deter a threatened Iraqi invasion of Kuwait later that year. Hard power remained a relevant way for the British Government to pursue its interests in Southern Arabia and the Gulf.⁵²⁰ Operation Vantage, a British contingency plan, was implemented in July 1961 when intelligence reports and the public announcements of the Iraqi President, Abdul Karim Qasim signalled his intention to annexe Kuwait. Kuwait was under British protection, confirmed by the exchange of letters between the two countries, a document that Qasim rejected the validity of. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) had been monitoring the growing tension between Iraq and Kuwait and was able to support political decision making and military deployments.⁵²¹ Despite the apparent successful deterrence, the decision by the British to intervene illustrates problems in intelligence analysis and Government decision making that effected Aden. Whilst the JIC assessments indicated that there was a threat of Iraqi military action, intelligence reports showed that, despite numerical superiority, there was little in the way of overt military preparation on the Iraqi side of the border. This may have been as a result of the deployment of British troops or, alternatively, it may have been that Iraq never really intended to attack Kuwait.⁵²² This shows the inherent difficulty of assessing other human beings' intentions. The continued protection of Kuwait necessitated the monitoring of Iraqi in the wake of Operation Vantage. On several occasions during the 1960s, intelligence indicated possible preparations for an Iraqi attack. This required the use of limited resources such as photo reconnaissance aircraft but also exposed the limited number of Arab linguists available to British intelligence organisations.⁵²³ Similar issues would arise during the campaign in South Arabia, where the lack of Arabic linguists would prove a problem for political warfare. The example of Kuwait also demonstrated that

⁵²⁰ Matthew Hughes (Ed), *British Ways of Counter-insurgency: A Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2013) p 31.

⁵²¹ TNA, CAB 158/44 JIC (61) 58 Iraq Threat to Kuwait During the Next Twelve Months, 18 August 1961 and DEFE 11/226 Iraq Threat to Kuwait.

⁵²² Richard Mobley, "UK Indicators and Warning: Gauging the Iraqi Threat to Kuwait in the 1960s", *Studies in Intelligence* 45:5 (2001) p 23.

⁵²³ TNA, DEFE 7/2122 The Threat to Kuwait, December 1963.

intelligence reporting was not a panacea when it came to assessing the threat from another country's leaders.⁵²⁴

The success of Operation Vantage appeared to demonstrate that the existing way of defending Britain's oil interests through military power was sound. This reasoning meant that the military facilities in Aden needed to be maintained. This is an example of how the framing of decisions around a particular context (in this case the securing of continued access to oil) can prevent the kind of ultra-rational debate that might have presented different options for policy makers in the early 1960s. The Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brook had encouraged Harold Macmillan to consider changing British policy of basing of military forces overseas as the means to secure interests.⁵²⁵ This missed an opportunity and these decisions took no account of the continuing rise of Arab nationalism in the region and particularly in Aden and the Protectorates.⁵²⁶ Unlike the deliberate moving of the British regional headquarters to support military operations in the Gulf, there was little development of the structures to govern the Federation. The federal civil service, military and police all lacked investment and this meant that power was still vested in the relationships between the colonial authorities and the individual sheiks, emirs and sultans, not institutions. The lack of state building during this period meant the Federation was a poor vehicle for British influence when it was challenged by more attractive (to local people) political organisations later in the decade. Instead the Governments plan rested on continuing to work through these individuals the British failed to offer much to groups outside of this small elite.

For marginalised migrant workers in Aden the various organisations that did represent them now offered a platform to challenge the status quo. The continued lack of reform and a growth in dynamic union activities led to more radical elements gaining traction. The independence lobby split into two main groupings. One side sought a compromise solution that would see independence but recognised that the British could be worked with to achieve this. The other, the ATUC under Abdullah Majid al-Asnag, focused on ending colonialism with a political coda of Nasserite Arab nationalism. The majority of the Yemenis living in Aden who were otherwise disenfranchised were represented by this body. Their influence brought increased calls for unification with Yemen, the exact

⁵²⁴ McNamara, "The Nasser Factor" p 56.

⁵²⁵ TNA, PREM 11/3430 Brook to Macmillan, 4 September 1961.

⁵²⁶ TNA, PREM 11/3430 Brook to Macmillan, 13 September 1961.

opposite of the what the British plan had been. It did, however, reinforce the official characterisation of the ATUC as an entity that was linked with “hostile elements” in other Middle Eastern countries whose aim was to use industrial unrest as a means of undermining the British position in both Aden and the Protectorates.⁵²⁷ Whilst this now associated the ATUC in a negative fashion and hostile to the Federation, for segments of the population outside of the more politically active (such as Aden Merchant middle class or young people in the Protectorates), the new governance structures offered them limited incentives to support it. There was no coherent plan to employ, train or promote people in the Federation structures. This denied the majority an opportunity to play any meaningful part in it, to develop the idea of a functioning state beyond a small group of rulers and kept decision making within a niche.⁵²⁸

The Establishment of a Political Warfare Organisation in South Arabia

From the records of the IRD and DFP it is now possible to gain a better understanding of the role the two organisations played in South Arabia. The files show where personnel were deployed and when, allowing the impact of political warfare to be better assessed than was previously possible. The threat to the Aden base was perceived to emanate from the hostile propaganda of President Nasser’s Egypt. It was reasoned that Arab nationalism was stoking the political dissent that was manifested through the ATUC. Reasoning that “conventional weapons cannot halt the war of indirect aggression”, propaganda, psychological warfare and covert action were identified as the British shield in South Arabia.⁵²⁹ With the ever-present shadow of Suez and the pressure of financial constraints, British hard power was curtailed and the Government sought to continue their influencing of events through covert action – sometimes known as *keenie meenie*.⁵³⁰ For example, the DFP used psychological operations to support the merger of the Colony and Protectorate including radio broadcasts, newsletters and leaflets.⁵³¹ The DFP records show that it was the primary organisation delivering political warfare in South Arabia in the early 1960s, with the priority being to “discreetly earn the goodwill of the people of the

⁵²⁷ TNA, CAB 134/1559 Colonial Policy Committee Memorandum, 6 July 1960.

⁵²⁸ Jacob Abadi, “Britain’s Abandonment of South Arabia – A Reassessment”, *Journal of Third World Studies* 12:1 (1995) p 162.

⁵²⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/14 Isaac to Wild, 4 July 1959.

⁵³⁰ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 72 and 80-81. See also Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 52 and “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism” p 171. Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny* and Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire* provide other examples of these activities.

⁵³¹ TNA, DEFE 28/168 Psychological Operations in Support of a Merger Between Aden Colony and the Federation, September 1961.

areas and in thereby protecting [the] position of the base”.⁵³² This was difficult when there was little evidence of investment in the Federation and therein no tangible benefit for the local population. With hindsight, the lack of development through a Federal model made it vulnerable to changing circumstances in the future. As well as psychological operations the DFP introduced ‘community relations’ as a way to generate favourable local sentiment towards the British and to “assist in combating subversion”.⁵³³ Community relation activities have not previously been identified as a method of political warfare before and this allows for the field of study to be extended. Activities included financial or physical support through the Armed Forces in towns or villages close to military bases or those visited by patrols and in Aden focused on young people through youth clubs, sports teams and schools.⁵³⁴ They also included “a special type of information” for the “projection of Britain”.⁵³⁵ Contemporary military doctrine identified that to be effective such measures needed to understand the “political, religious, social...and conditions of...individual groups, races or nationalities from the potential target”.⁵³⁶ The reports by the DFP unfortunately record that there was still a lack of knowledge of the local area and this ignorance was leading to missed opportunities for building up goodwill in Aden.⁵³⁷ This seems odd as the British were invested in maintaining the military base and therefore securing local cooperation should have been important. DFP reports record a lack of effort or inability to understand the local population and therein identify and deliver community relations activities to secure goodwill towards Britain.

Organisational changes were now made to both the DFP and IRD which would affect the delivery of political warfare during the rest of the campaign. The changes show an increase in the covert or unattributable delivery of propaganda and psychological warfare (from then on known as psychological operations).⁵³⁸ Previously DFP operations in South Arabia had focused on improving the image of Britain in the Middle East through publicising events like the gifting of equipment to Sudan in 1961.⁵³⁹ Instead of the overt building of relations, DFP files record that its members began to look for covert ways to

⁵³² TNA, DEFE 28/168 Regional Information Officer to Glass, 26 April 1962.

⁵³³ TNA, DEFE 28/1 Directorate of Forward Plans Append C Armed Forces Community Relations Programme, 10 June 1966.

⁵³⁴ The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁵³⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/165 Barclay to Reddaway, 15 October 1963.

⁵³⁶ The War Office, *The Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 7.

⁵³⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/164 Wild to Ross-Magenty, 20 Jan 1960.

⁵³⁸ Rory Cormac, “Techniques of Covert Propaganda: The British Approach in the mid-1960s”, *Intelligence and National Security* 34:7 (2019) p 1065 and Mawby “The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism” p 178.

⁵³⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/164 Shackleton to Wild, 30 May 1961.

disrupt opposition groups, such as the suggestion to secretly produce anti-ATUC cartoons. These could then be distributed without attribution to the source through the media contacts of the Aden Special Branch.⁵⁴⁰ In 1962 the DFP officer (Major Shackleton) in Headquarters Middle East Command was given a new role, to coordinate “information as a weapon” through what had originally been the “SPA” [Special Political Action] committee but was renamed “Action Working Party” and directed against the ATUC.⁵⁴¹ Community relations now under the codename Operation Flavia would also be a part of Shackleton’s new role now renamed GSO II Coordination, which in time would become GSO I (Civil Affairs).⁵⁴² This would be a cover for the DFP officers work and the promotion of the post from that of a Major (GSO II) to a Lieutenant Colonel (GSO I) increasing the seniority, experience and impact that the role could have.

From archival records an increased risk appetite, at least within the DFP, is evident. The organisation recorded the possibility of compromising visitors to Aden in “grey or black operation[s]”.⁵⁴³ Intriguingly the DFP files show that this idea was in relation to the recent visit of Labour MPs, Bob Edwards and George Thomson, who had met with the ATUC. According to a signal from the Commander in Chief of British Forces the visit had raised the morale of the ATUC and increased “the risk of labour and internal security trouble”.⁵⁴⁴ The suggestion that future visitors might be deliberately discredited goes beyond previous understanding of the DFP’s role, although the actual outcome was far less dramatic. The wish to counter the ATUC and the impact of the MPs visit was used as evidence for needing an Information Adviser to the Governor (later the High Commissioner). The appointment would be a significant development in the political warfare campaign, demonstrating a wish to better coordinate the Government’s information operations. A member of IRD, Ben Strachan, was appointed as the first Information Adviser in October 1962.⁵⁴⁵

The changes to the DFP structures in Aden and the appointment of an Information Advisor meant that a more comprehensive political warfare organisation was now in place. The DFP was responsible for psychological operations and community relations inside South Arabia. The Information Advisor (and IRD) would focus on propaganda and counter-

⁵⁴⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/168 Shackleton to Wild, August 1962 and DEFE 28/164 DFP to CDS, 10 October 1962.

⁵⁴¹ TNA, DEFE 28/168 Shackleton to Wild, August 1962.

⁵⁴² TNA, DEFE 28/169 Regional Information Office, 25 August 1962 and Wild to Shackleton, 21 Jun 1962.

⁵⁴³ TNA, DEFE 28/168 Information Service – Aden, 3 July 1962.

⁵⁴⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/168, CinC MidEast to MOD, 28 Jun 1962.

⁵⁴⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/169, Shackleton to Wild, 13 October 1962.

propaganda but there was an implicit task to integrate all political warfare efforts too. The release of a 1963 Cabinet report on HMG's 'Unavowable Information Services' (first available in 2018) provides new information on the IRD in particular. Through its "Great Leap Forward" IRD's work and budget expanded recognising "the need for novel and unconventional forms of counter-subversion activity".⁵⁴⁶ IRD files released in 2019 provide evidence of the previously little known Special Operations Section, which produced 'black' or material of a false origin, that could be disavowed by the government.⁵⁴⁷ Interpretations that IRD was primarily a propaganda organisation are therefore not completely correct. As was the case in South Arabia, IRD was active in a number of areas including counter-subversion and special operations. The approach of viewing its activities through political warfare is more accurate. By "sowing confusion or division" black or unattributable propaganda could potentially be more disruptive in nature than white or grey material.⁵⁴⁸ Under Hans Welser, a veteran of the wartime Political Warfare Executive, the Special Operations Section would work closely with the Information Advisor in South Arabia. Finally, the Regional Information Office (RIO) in Beirut would now be the focal point for carrying out the "IRD's unattributable and covert information operations" in the Middle East.⁵⁴⁹ As well as internal organisational changes a Foreign Office (FO) led but interdepartmental, Counter Subversion Committee (CSC) was created to better coordinate the "countering of hostile propaganda, subversion and penetration".⁵⁵⁰ Committees such as the CSC and the reorganisation of Britain's political warfare organisation in South Arabia meant that more effective orchestrate should now have been possible.

The reorganisation of political warfare in South Arabia was timely as it was now required to "produce the climate of public opinion on which" the use of the base depended, as "Aden... is the linch-pin of our strategy in the Middle East".⁵⁵¹ Given its significance measuring the effectiveness of political warfare should have been an important consideration. There appears however to have been no process to measure the quantity of propaganda produced, nor the actual impact of operations on a target audience. What

⁵⁴⁶ TNA, CAB 301/399 A Report on the Unavowable Information Services of Her Majesty's Government Overseas by Lord Strand, July 1963.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Cormac, "Techniques of Covert Propaganda" p 1065.

⁵⁴⁹ TNA, CAB 301/399 A Report on the Unavowable Information Services of Her Majesty's Government Overseas by Lord Strand, July 1963.

⁵⁵⁰ TNA, CAB 164/1161 Counter Subversion Committee, 3 May 1972. Describing events from a decade earlier (1962), the joint secretary of the Counter Subversion Committee, Leslie Glass, wrote the retrospective report as part of discussions on its future in 1972.

⁵⁵¹ TNA, DEFE 28/169 Minister of Defence to Colonial Secretary, 30 July 1962 and CDS to Minister of Defence, 25 July 1962.

was identified was the lack of local knowledge, reported by the DFP as a barrier to optimising its activities, was just as much of a problem in the IRD too. The Regional Information Officer for the Middle East wrote that the organisations approach to understanding the target audience were “deplorably amateurish”.⁵⁵² The need for better data and information was identified as this would allow for the messages to be properly formed to the local conditions. More fundamentally statistics on literacy or radio coverage would guide the most appropriate way to successfully deliver the methods of political warfare.⁵⁵³ Given the importance of the Aden to British interests, in hindsight, it appears extremely risky to entrust the security of the base to such activities, the results of which were difficult to measure.

That the British Government entrusted the countering of Arab nationalism to political warfare is almost certainly a reflection of both Britain’s reduced hard power assets to forcibly contain subversive elements and the negative impact that overt action would have on Britain’s image and influence. The British anticipated that their regional position was threatened but, crucially, believed they could control events. With time and in the relative isolation of early 60s South Arabia this probably was not an unreasonable assumption. Although Arab opinion was generally hostile, as seen through calls by the secretary of the Arab League for all members to unite and destroy the Federation, there was no direct action. The gravest threat came from internal dissent, mainly in the trade union movement, which saw the Federation as a device for Britain to consolidate its presence in the region – which was pretty accurate. In 1962 the ATUC formed its own political party, the People’s Socialist Party (PSP), who became adept at organising strikes and mass demonstrations. The colonial authorities attempted to implement a pragmatic process of constitutional reform, through which it aimed to set a framework for future independence. Unfortunately attempts to control events in South Arabia were dealt a blow when a revolution in Yemen in September 1962 swept away the Imam and replaced him with a pro Nasser military regime. Alarmed for the safety of its presence in South Arabia with Nasser and the Soviets pouring troops and equipment into the new republic the British were determined to halt this threat, again, through the use covert means.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² TNA, FO 1110/1562 Strachan to Barclay, 14 May 1962.

⁵⁵³ The War Office, *The Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 8.

⁵⁵⁴ Ferris, “Soviet Support for Egypt’s Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963”.

The Impact of the Revolution in Yemen

The seizure of power in Yemen from Iman Muhammad al-Badr by Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal established an Arab nationalist Government next to Britain's foremost military base in the Middle East. The direct support by President Nasser to the Yemeni revolution presented a new threat to British interests in South Arabia. In Aden the coup was welcomed by the leadership of the ATUC and its political wing the PSP who organised strikes and violent demonstrations in support of it. With funds and arms supplied from UAR bases across the border, nationalist groups in South Arabia would now be able to increase their attacks. So grave were official concerns that the Prime Minister recorded in his diary in October 1962 that, "in spite of the more immediate dangers elsewhere, I felt gravely concerned about our position in Aden".⁵⁵⁵ Conventional military action against Yemen would be difficult given the legacy of Suez and Britain's damaged prestige in the Middle East. Covert operations offered a way of disrupting Britain's enemies in Yemen and by way of being a "useful third option" between open force and diplomacy they were an effective method of political warfare.⁵⁵⁶

The famous activities of British sponsored mercenaries in Yemen have been well documented by the historian Clive Jones and more recently by Duff Hart Davies.⁵⁵⁷ For the pro imperial 'Aden Group' led by Conservative MPs, Julian Amery and Neil McLean, the arrival of Egyptian Troops in Yemen appeared a perfect opportunity to confront President Nasser. Both Amery and McLean had served with the wartime Special Operations Executive and this shared experience highly likely influenced the way they proposed to pursue a campaign in Yemen. If the Yemen revolution was to be used as a spring board to eject the British from South Arabia, then the Aden Group's proposal was to prevent this by getting "the Egyptian troops out of the Yemen. If this were not possible then...the Egyptians in the Yemen [would be] so busy defending themselves against the Yemenis that they [would] not be able to intervene in Aden and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula".⁵⁵⁸ Pursuing a strategy of my enemy's enemy is my friend, the Governments of both Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home would give tacit approval to the backing of the Royalist cause in Yemen. Once again pragmatism in British policy prevailed, seeing them cooperate with the Saudis who at the time were pressing for territorial recognition of

⁵⁵⁵ Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day, 1961-63* (London: Macmillan, 1973) p 267.

⁵⁵⁶ Cormac, "Coordinating Covert Action" p 695.

⁵⁵⁷ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War 1962-65* and Hart-Davies, *The War that Never Was*.

⁵⁵⁸ Imperial War Museum (IWM), Neil McLean Files, box 20.

their claim to the Buraimi Oasis. By working together in Yemen, the British and Saudi Arabian Governments saw a way to halt Nasser's ambition in the region.

Aden became a hub for supporting the mercenaries dispatched to bolster Royalist efforts inside Yemen.⁵⁵⁹ Through the support of the Aden Group and more restrained encouragement by the British Government, backing the Royalists might have seemed like an ideal solution to an Arab nationalist revolution on South Arabia's doorstep. To those in the Aden Group there was an implicit link between the conflict in Yemen and the British position in Aden. Whilst the ultimate objective was the expulsion of Egyptian forces from Yemen to Amery and McLean, with their experience of covert operations, this did not necessarily mean that Royalist forces needed to defeat the UAR forces directly.⁵⁶⁰ Whilst covert action in Yemen might seem like a way of ultimately controlling events in Aden there were repercussions to this strategy. The civil war in Yemen drew in a plethora of interests and agendas that thrust South Arabia into the international arena. Scrutiny of the Federation of South Arabia model (of which Aden joined in 1963) by international organisations was now greater than it might otherwise have been and the revolution itself became not only an inspiration for Arab nationalists in the FSA but also a base from which to attack British colonialism across the border.⁵⁶¹ Under a young and radical leadership, the struggle against the Federation now turned violent. For a model of governance that required stability in order to nurture institutions and rulers that would support Britain post-independence, the pragmatic decision to wage a covert war against Nasser was a gamble.

Counter-Subversion Not Counter-Insurgency, 1963-65

The covert campaign in Yemen against an Arab nationalist regime and its Egyptian backers was assumed by elements of the British Government to be the best way to neutralise the threat to its continued presence in South Arabia. It was understood by senior colonial officials that the Aden base would only be viable if a "prosperous Arab state on terms of friendly partnership" could be secured.⁵⁶² Even so British attempts to fashion a multipolar identity through their vision of the Federation lacked investment in its structures. Power was retained in the hands of the old elite and the segments of the

⁵⁵⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/169 Regional Information Office letter, 25 Apr 1962.

⁵⁶⁰ IWM, Neil McLean Files, box 6 – reports by David Smiley. See also Clive Jones, *The Clandestine Lives of Colonel David Smiley* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019) p 290.

⁵⁶¹ Asher Orkaby, "The North Yemen Civil War and the Failure of the Federation of South Arabia", *Middle Eastern Studies* 53:1 (2017) p 73.

⁵⁶² TNA, FO 371/168630 Johnston to Colonial Office, 16 July 1963.

population that Britain needed to garner support from, if it was to secure long-term influence, were offered very little in terms of educational, societal or political reform.

As violence increased during 1963, events could be seen by some through the prism of an insurgency which, “included both guerrilla warfare and terrorism”.⁵⁶³ For other practitioners the covert campaign mounted against Arab nationalism was considered to be one of counter-subversion and not a comprehensive counter-insurgency. The character of the campaign was recorded by the High Commissioner, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, as one where Britain’s adversaries were developing “a deliberate plan for the subversion of the Federation”.⁵⁶⁴ By examining the campaign to counter Arab nationalist subversion through the use of political warfare, the Government response and its uncoordinated manner can be better understood.⁵⁶⁵ The IRD files, used in combination with those of the DFP, explain how activities such as psychological operations and community relations that should have spearheaded the counter-subversion effort were actually ineffectively targeted. In this way, the individual activities never produced results greater than the sum of the parts.

Failure in South Arabia was largely due to problems in the Governments intelligence services but the inability to successfully cohere policy and strategy by successive Governments (both Labour and Conservative) demonstrates weaknesses in the machinery of government too. Using political warfare as an analytical lens therein allows for new insights to be drawn on other areas too. Almost certainly both counter-subversion and counter-insurgency took place in South Arabia, depending on the individual or organisations perspective. A counter-insurgency campaign would have required greater resources than those deployed for counter-subversion. The more coordinated response however could have meant a more effective targeting of political warfare and the countering of the external and internal threats to the Federation of South Arabia. In fact, chances to influence or shape public opinion were missed, largely resulting from a lack of understanding of the population by British officials. As the security situation worsened it was more difficult to conduct the kind of development projects that might have demonstrated Britain’s want to improve the lives of ordinary people. The local population ultimately realised that continued British influence of the Federation was highly unlikely to benefit them. In such circumstances, it is unlikely that either counter-subversion or

⁵⁶³ Paget, *Last Post* p 23.

⁵⁶⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/169 Telegram from Trevaskis to Colonial Office, 13 December 1963.

⁵⁶⁵ Davey, “Conflicting Worldviews, Mutual Incomprehension” p 552.

counter-insurgency could ultimately have achieved a situation where the local population consented to Britain's continued presence.

An important belief underpinning the British approach to its operations in South Arabia was the conviction of both Harold Macmillan, his successor as Prime Minister, Alex Douglas-Home, and members of the Cabinet that they knew the enemy they faced. It was one of Nasserite inspired Arab nationalism that threatened their country's overseas interests. They were confident in Britain's policy and strategy but an inter-departmental review of activity East of Suez, conducted in mid-1963, questioned the viability of Britain's long-term objectives. The paper described that British "forces in all areas are already stretched to the limit in terms of commitments, the cost of equipping and transporting them is rising faster than GNP and there is not scope for further savings by measures of economy".⁵⁶⁶ Britain would find it increasingly difficult to support the Southern Arabian rulers (including those in the Gulf) against the tide of Arab nationalism. Whilst the paper was produced for senior civil servants and not ministers, it highlighted the debate within Whitehall during this period. It articulated that there were alternatives to continuing the policy of maintaining the base and through it, securing British interests in the region. It was the tendency of officials, particularly in the Colonial and Foreign Offices of "harking back" to a "wait and see" approach that was preventing other options being implemented.⁵⁶⁷ Now was the time to consider changing Britain's traditional approach of securing its interests through military leverage and replace it with one of "unify and withdraw".⁵⁶⁸ This shift would aim to achieve four objectives: withdrawing British military forces (and reducing costs); "honourably" disengaging commitments to Britain's traditional allies in Kuwait, the Gulf and South Arabia; create a stable pro-British (and anti-Communist) group; and encourage regional economic development through the use of oil revenues.⁵⁶⁹ The paper did not underestimate the difficulties of the proposed course of action but argued that by starting the transition now it would provide a window of opportunity before Britain's options narrowed.

Whilst ministers and officials debated in Whitehall, the political warfare campaign continued. A new GSO II post was established to coordinate propaganda to the Federal

⁵⁶⁶ TNA, CAB 21/5902 Future Policy in the Middle East and Far East. Memorandum by Cary (draft), 2 May 1963.

⁵⁶⁷ TNA, CAB 21/5902 Cary to Trend, 8 May 1963.

⁵⁶⁸ TNA, CAB 21/5902 Future Policy in the Middle East and Far East. Memorandum by Cary (draft), 2 May 1963.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

Army.⁵⁷⁰ This was known as the Information Adviser to the Federal Ministry of Defence.⁵⁷¹ While DFP files show the continuation of overt means to build up morale, IRD files record the increasing use of covert means to counter adversary propaganda. In a surreptitious attempt to counter Egyptian attacks against the Federation the Information Adviser in Aden, Ben Strachan, proposed dubbing a particularly anti-British Egyptian newsreel that was being shown in Aden. Creating “fresh commentary” was considered a less negative approach than simply banning the material outright.⁵⁷² Ultimately the idea was thought to be technically impracticable but the example shows the defensive approach that British political warfare took.⁵⁷³ There does not appear to have been any suggestion to counter such attacks by demonstrating that the Federation was a better model for South Arabia than that offered by the opposition. The FO including members of IRD were supposedly “horrified” by Strachan’s plan, although the CO were initially supportive.⁵⁷⁴ Some members of IRD may not have agreed with a more disruptive approach but evidence from IRD’s Special Operations Section points to such activities actually increasing despite such opinions. In August 1963 deliberately false leaflets warning of the dangers of Egyptian domination were posted from Beirut to Federation addresses. The actual effect of the leaflets was not measured although it was reported that “there is some evidence that this has had some effect”.⁵⁷⁵ The evidence from IRD files is interesting because it shows how increasingly British officials thought the best way to strike back was through unattributable propaganda. The material from the IRD files is useful here as it shows an approach to political warfare that was less persuasive than might otherwise have been the case. Such a way of operating demonstrates a level of indifference to the local population. What actually mattered was striking back at Egypt not promoting an alternative. That such a concept of operations was limited can be judged by the fact that there was no attempt to measure the effect that political warfare was actually having.

Despite attempts to use political warfare the High Commissioner, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, reported in October 1963 that “we are in effect equipped with the instruments to deal with the physical consequences of subversion but not with the weapons to deal with subversion itself”.⁵⁷⁶ In order to create a stable political entity through the Federation the British

⁵⁷⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/164 Wild to Hancock, 6 Aug 1963.

⁵⁷¹ The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁵⁷² TNA, FCO 168/940 Strachan to Armitage-Smith, 2 February 1963.

⁵⁷³ TNA, FCO 168/940 Barclay to Strachan, 7 June 1963.

⁵⁷⁴ TNA, FCO 168/940 Drinkall to Bushell, 2 April 1963 and Bushell to Drinkall, 18 April 1963.

⁵⁷⁵ TNA, FCO 168/893 Barclay to Glass, 15 August 1963.

⁵⁷⁶ TNA, CO 1035/213 Counter-Subversion in the Aden State, 24 October 1963.

needed to increase resources far beyond those previously provided as they needed to build a functioning state almost from scratch. DFP files reported that the overt community relations (Operation Flavia) were already being “starved of funds” and viewed as insufficient to the task of generating goodwill.⁵⁷⁷ The discreet use of propaganda, psychological and special operations satisfactorily hide Britain’s activity in Southern Arabia but the limited investment in development projects would not create the groundswell of support for Britain’s continued presence or influence. If a counter-insurgency strategy had been pursued at this point, its more expensive and extensive measures might have had a better chance of success. This is because in counter-insurgency the methods of political warfare are usually focused on creating the conditions for the direct or indirect control of the population rather than just countering subversive elements.⁵⁷⁸ In South Arabia the British Government failed to offer any concrete political development beyond the system that already existed and defunded development programmes in favour of information services to counter Radio Cairo and other Arab nationalist broadcasters. These methods would not deliver the control of the local population that Britain considered necessary in securing the base and therein its wider interests in the region. In fact, the security situation deteriorated sharply on 10 December 1963 when a grenade was thrown at a group of colonial officials, including Trevaskis, at Khormaksar Airport. This resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency in South Arabia.

Although the security situation had deteriorated and the High Commissioner attacked, Trevaskis might still have taken some solace from the arrival of a new Information Advisor. Anthony (Tony) Ashworth was a former British Army Officer who had served in the Queen’s Own Hussars.⁵⁷⁹ Like his predecessor, Ben Strachan, Ashworth was a member of IRD but he would benefit from increased resources provided under the state of emergency.⁵⁸⁰ Both Ashworth and Trevaskis were convinced of the direct threat to the Federation from Egyptian and Yemeni activity. Covert means would be particularly pushed by them through the distribution of unattributable propaganda and special operations.⁵⁸¹ IRD files show that Ashworth quickly built up contacts in the Arab media and was able to use this influence to have the editor of a pro Communist newspaper, *Al Taqha*, replaced with someone who appeared left leaning and anti-British but was in fact

⁵⁷⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/164 Wild Visit Report to Chiefs of Staff, 25 March 1963.

⁵⁷⁸ Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy* p 17.

⁵⁷⁹ Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, *The Army List Part 1* (London: HMSO, 1969) p 11.

⁵⁸⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/169, Shackleton to Wild, 13 October 1962 and DEFE 28/165 Drew to PS/Minister [of Defence], 29 November 1963.

⁵⁸¹ TNA, DEFE 25/17 Trevaskis to Sandys, 8 January 1964.

content to work under Ashworth's direction.⁵⁸² By the middle of 1964 Ashworth had successfully gained control of at least two thirds of the Arab press using similar methods.⁵⁸³ Ashworth used this influence over the press to covertly push the threat of Egypt and Yemen to the Federation during the October 1964 elections.

Through such manipulation of the press, Ashworth aimed to influence not only elections but to covertly attack the opposition groups from within. That he could accomplish this was because the British were intercepting the post in Aden, as can now be established from recently released IRD records.⁵⁸⁴ When it was discovered that anti-British material was widely distributed by post, Ashworth identified a way of accomplishing his aim of splitting the Arab nationalist groups and getting them to fight amongst themselves, rather than attacking the British. Through the interception of known opposition groups mail, Tony Ashworth "lifted" anti-British material such as newsletters being sent to newspapers and other media outlets outside of South Arabia.⁵⁸⁵ The intercepted material was replaced by Ashworth, who used forged documents to purport that one group was dissatisfied by the efforts of another or that a group suspected the commitment of another party to the cause. Such methods achieved some success as Ashworth was later able to report to IRD that the forgeries had successfully convinced opposition groups that they were genuine.⁵⁸⁶ He did not record whether they actually achieved splits between the groups. Although Ashworth wrote of his intention to continue to use such methods doubts were building within the political warfare community about this approach.

Whilst Tony Ashworth's covert activities provide new evidence of British activities through political warfare in South Arabia, at the time his increasingly independent operations were not universally admired. The deputy director of the DFP, Noel Wild, wrote in November 1964 that, "I am fully aware that Tony is inclined to be "a cat which walks by itself" which does not make for easy co-operation".⁵⁸⁷ Far from splitting the adversary groups in South Arabia, there was disagreement between officials of the two organisations conducting political warfare there. The disagreement was over the balance between overt political warfare activities such as the community relations projects conducted by the DFP and the increasingly covert operations of the Information Advisor. This was exactly the situation

⁵⁸² TNA, FCO 168/1112 Ashworth to Elwell, 24 July 1964.

⁵⁸³ TNA, FCO 168/1112 Ashworth to Elwell, 6 August 1964.

⁵⁸⁴ TNA, FCO 168/1115 Ashworth to Welser, 2 January 1965.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ TNA, FCO 168/1537 Ashworth to Welser, 1 April 1965.

⁵⁸⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/155 Wild to Hancock, 19 November 1964.

that ministers had wished to avoid when they wrote of the “need to strengthen our resources for counter-subversion over the whole range of normal information work to completely ‘black’ operations”.⁵⁸⁸ The ‘black’ or unattributable operations of Tony Ashworth, whilst fully sanctioned, saw a neglecting of the overt propaganda work, that meant a comprehensive approach to the delivery of political warfare was not followed. In one case the suggestion that two Arab Officers of the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion and the Mukalla Regular Army visit Britain took nearly eight months to organise.⁵⁸⁹ This type of relationship building activity should have been important given that opposition groups were as capable of creating rifts between the British and Federal Forces, as the British were between them.⁵⁹⁰ Instead Tony Ashworth, who was partially responsible for the visit, appears to have deprioritised overt propaganda and relationship building activities or at least prioritised his other covert activities.

British officials including Ashworth continued to focus their activities against the influence of President Nasser’s Egypt believing that they were the main instigators of anti-British activities in South Arabia. This assumption demonstrated little understanding of the opposition groups at this point nor the level of support that the local population provided them. It suggests that there was some failure by the British intelligence community to adequately identify and analyse the different groups and to report this to British decision makers. Even had a perfect intelligence system existed, then the British Government’s machinery would have needed to react to the reporting. The evidence suggests this would have been unlikely, given the way British policy developed towards the idea of a federation for example. Ultimately the lack of understanding of the situation in South Arabia meant that even when a range of political warfare activities were conducted, they could not provide a solution for a complex problem. These pre-existing problems would be magnified when a change of government bought a set of politically different and inexperienced ministers to office.

Intelligence For Understanding

Contemporary military doctrine records that psychological operations (a method of political warfare) were “an essential contribution to...IS [internal security] operations”.⁵⁹¹ Such

⁵⁸⁸ TNA, DEFE 28 165 Colonial Secretary to Minister of Defence, 17 January 1964.

⁵⁸⁹ TNA DEFE 28/155 Hancock to Wild, 14 November 1964 and Richmond to Cross, 27 March 1965.

⁵⁹⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/155 Richmond to Wild, 15 April 1965.

⁵⁹¹ The War Office, *Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 6.

methods had been successfully employed in previous campaigns and the emphasis placed on them in official manuals suggests they were viewed as more important than has previously been understood. For the activities to be successful it was vitally important that they were based on accurate intelligence, “the most important single factor in the prosecution of IS operations” like those in South Arabia.⁵⁹² From this it should have been obvious that without effective intelligence support political warfare activities could well be misdirected and the effectiveness of them wasted. That this was not the case offers the opportunity for this study to investigate and analyse intelligence support from a fresh perspective and add to the scholarship on the subject. There should have been a symbiotic relationship between the two elements if political warfare was to be greater than the sum of its parts. Unfortunately, despite protests from within the colonial government, insufficient interest, time and resources were directed towards intelligence gathering and analysis in South Arabia.⁵⁹³ The intelligence failings in South Arabia meant that developments in the terrorist campaign were neither predicted, nor quickly quashed. As a result, when an insurrection broke out, intelligence reform was conducted in crisis. In April 1964 Sir Kennedy Trevaskis wrote to Duncan Sandys that the security situation in the mountainous border area of the Radfan was more serious than first thought. Initially attacks against Federation forces in the Radfan had been put down to dissident tribesmen but now Trevaskis wrote that the activities were part of a coordinated “subversive effort” backed by Egypt and Yemen.⁵⁹⁴ The inability to understand the situation in Southern Arabia meant a limited number of terrorists were already able to tie down a large number of Federal and British troops. It also meant that important activities for improving security were not effectively targeted.

Specifically for political warfare the failure to adequately identify the threats to South Arabia meant that its various methods lacked the detailed intelligence reporting they required and were therefore less effective than they should have been. The various agencies and organisations of the intelligence community in South Arabia all had distinct characteristics which often produced bureaucratic wrangling. In a culture where knowledge literally was power, information sharing was sometimes poor across

⁵⁹² The War Office, *Keeping the Peace* p 59.

⁵⁹³ John Harding, “Britain’s Security Response: Was the protectorate Aden’s Shield or Achilles Heel?” in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds) *Britain’s Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 37.

⁵⁹⁴ TNA, DEFE 25/17 Trevaskis to Sandys, 5 April 1964.

bureaucratic boundaries.⁵⁹⁵ Beyond organisational rivalries, a more refined explanation as to why the British found the South Arabian opposition difficult to comprehend can be put forward. “The tribal loyalties of the inbred social class, on the fraying fringe of Britain’s aristocracy, that nurtured friendships, both real and feigned...created the boys’ club that populated its foreign, colonial and intelligence services”.⁵⁹⁶ Members harboured, “a shared set of assumptions about the world and their privileged place in it.”⁵⁹⁷ This helps to explain the worldview of those involved not just in the intelligence services but also some in the colonial administration and wider Whitehall bureaucracy. The people that were recruited were predominantly from one social class and represented an extremely narrow background from which to expect creativity and divergent thought to emerge. From these conscious and unconscious biases, an underlying failure to adequately comprehend different perspectives in South Arabia can be found. By no means were all officials as narrow minded as those described above but a lack of understanding of groups outside of the narrow background of British officials, meant that accurate and effective advice about such a different culture was highly unlikely to emerge.

As insurgency gripped South Arabia from 1964, the JIC was the organisation that intervened to reorganise the intelligence community in South Arabia. Whilst structural reforms were implemented and slowly improved the direction, collation, processing and dissemination of material, assessment remained problematic.⁵⁹⁸ Recent scholarly accounts of the intelligence campaign have focused on the prolonged debate within government as to the nature of the threat in South Arabia.⁵⁹⁹ This issue exacerbated problems for political warfare operators in the area. The failure to identify the primary threat meant that propaganda and psychological operations were targeted at the wrong entity. British intelligence was staggeringly slow to understand the terrorist networks throughout the campaign, with accurate assessments only being made after a comprehensive review of internal structures and processes.⁶⁰⁰ This lack of understanding of the terrorist organisations, their membership and modus operandi directly affected British strategy during the campaign. By focusing on the threat from Egypt, the

⁵⁹⁵ Jim Herlihy, *The Aden Emergency 1963-1967* p 36, <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/adenemergency.htm> accessed on 1 Mar 2020.

⁵⁹⁶ Walter Isaacson, “In From the Cold” *New York Times* (24 Jul 2014) <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/books/review/ben-macintyres-a-spy-among-friends.html>. Accessed 22 December 2021.

⁵⁹⁷ Macintyre, *A Spy Amongst Friends* p 244.

⁵⁹⁸ Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 130.

⁵⁹⁹ Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 122 and Walton, *Empire of Secrets* p 322.

⁶⁰⁰ TNA, CAB 182/54 Intelligence Organisation in Aden, 21 Dec 1965.

intelligence community missed that the adversary groups were generated from within the South Arabian population. Political warfare needed to target them and wider British strategy need to consider how their behaviour and attitudes could be changed, rather than focus solely on Nasserite Arab nationalism.

That assessments differed over the issue of threat, is not surprising as the CO (and the Aden Group) were informed by personnel in South Arabia, while the JIC was removed from the area of operations.⁶⁰¹ The official historian of the JIC, Michael Goodman suggests that in hindsight the Committee fell into “the misperception that the enemy would behave exactly as you would yourself”.⁶⁰² Such a view by the JIC is understandable but goes beyond the lack of diversity in the recruiting pool of British intelligence already identified. Whilst Aden may have been an intelligence hub, where a myriad of agencies came together, it was not just limited structurally but operationally. The assassination campaign that killed experienced Special Branch personnel was one example but more pressing was the lack of Arabists within the intelligence community as a whole.⁶⁰³ Few British personnel spoke Arabic and so interpreters and translators from the local community were employed. Like Special Branch these people became targets for assassination or intimidation. There appears to have been a failure by British officials to comprehend that collecting and processing intelligence, depended on the willingness of the local population to support the security forces.⁶⁰⁴ For political warfare being unable to comprehend the local language or have material translated was severely limiting. It meant that even had a greater number of personnel been employed then their impact would have been diminished. Further, the failure to resource the number of Arabists had a disproportionate effect with regard to accurately assessing “psychological vulnerabilities” to particular outputs such as radio broadcasts or community projects.⁶⁰⁵ Without the ability to interpret the local language, such measures were severely restricted meaning the ability to accurately target and measure the impact of political warfare was significantly reduced.

⁶⁰¹ Clive Jones, “‘Where the state feared to tread’: Britain, Britons, Covert Action and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-64”, *Intelligence and National Security* 21:5 (2006) p 722.

⁶⁰² Michael Goodman, “The Dog That Didn’t Bark: The JIC and Warning of Aggression”, *Cold War History* 7:4 (2007) p 531.

⁶⁰³ Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 126.

⁶⁰⁴ Clark, *Yemen* p 78.

⁶⁰⁵ The War Office. *Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 7.

Change of Government

At the same time as the insurrection in South Arabia was intensifying, in London the Cabinet Secretary, Burke Trend, asked the Prime Minister's permission to create a committee to consider British long-term strategy. The previous study group had been that set up by Macmillan in 1960 and his directive in October 1961 formed "the guideline for British global policy for the remainder of the Conservatives' term in office".⁶⁰⁶ Trend was likely anticipating a general election later in 1964 and wanted a committee to examine British interests overseas in preparation for new ministers or a new government. The committee was named the Long Term Study Group (LTSG). During the final months of Douglas-Home's Government, the security situation in Aden considerably worsened and additional resources were required to defend the Federation. This increased expense supported the conclusion of the LTSG that the central problem facing the Government was the strain that British commitments overseas were making on limited resources.⁶⁰⁷ Considered but decisive choices were required to either invest significant resources in defending the base or rapidly withdrawing.

The victory of the Labour Party in 1964 ended thirteen years of Conservative Government. The years of Conservative rule had hardly been smooth (covering four prime ministers) but its longevity meant that the new ministers lacked governmental experience, with only three members (including the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson) having held office before. Although unemployment was low and the economy relatively productive, Britain was still suffering problems with its external balance of payments. Whilst they might not have appreciated how poorly Britain's economy was performing, the Wilson Government had campaigned on a bold new vision for Britain, harnessing the white heat of technology to overcome Britain's social and economic problems – all expensive ambitions.⁶⁰⁸ Wilson was then the youngest Prime Minister of the twentieth century and had already proved a highly effective party leader.⁶⁰⁹ The Labour Party of 1964 was a broad church, encompassing traditional left-wing elements and liberal idealists. Wilson had been adept at uniting these different elements and if his domestic policy was revolutionary because of the blending of the Labour Party's different ideals, then Wilson's foreign policy also seemed different from his

⁶⁰⁶ Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez* p 28.

⁶⁰⁷ TNA, CAB 148/10 Memorandum by the Foreign Office for the DOP(O)C on Report of the Long Term Study Group – Regional Study on the Middle East, 21 October 1964.

⁶⁰⁸ Sandbrook, *White Heat* p 19.

⁶⁰⁹ Ziegler, *Wilson* p 140.

conservative predecessors.⁶¹⁰ There was a strong belief in the UN, questions over Britain's nuclear deterrent and an anti-colonial body within the party itself, all of which pointed to more liberal interpretations of foreign affairs.

In his memoirs Harold Wilson wrote that the rulers of the Federation of South Arabia, were "feudalist, almost pre-biblical".⁶¹¹ Similarly, Denis Healey stated that he could not understand, "how the previous Government could have planned to force the urbanised cosmopolitan Adenis into a marriage with the backwards tribesmen of the interior".⁶¹² Almost certainly the Federation rulers did appear just as Wilson and Healey described them but they were Britain's local interlocutors in the project to federate Aden and the surrounding Protectorates and therein secure British interests in Southern Arabia. Statements such as those from the then Prime Minister and his longest serving Secretary of State, are an important part of the historiography. Although politically less sympathetic to the idea of the Federation, Wilson's goals of British foreign policy remained largely unchanged, at least to begin with. Indeed, Wilson's rhetoric that Britain's frontiers lay on the Himalayas appeared to reflect the continuation of a world role.⁶¹³ Contradictions from the new Government have been described as "the fear (which constantly tormented Labour leaders), that to be seen to favour the reduction of British world power and influence would expose them to Conservative attack and arouse patriotic resentment among Labour's own working class supporters".⁶¹⁴ This meant that overseas commitments continued to stretch British resources as the Government attempted to maintain the East of Suez role.

The LTSG's final paper on foreign policy argued that to withdraw from Aden now could allow the Arab nationalists to gain power and that any compulsion to leave would impact Britain's prestige: "No doubt with difficulty we could hold on to the base...for some time but we might conclude before 1975 that we would be well advised to withdraw".⁶¹⁵ Wilson and particularly the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Anthony Greenwood, considered that moderate elements in the Aden population could be brought into a more democratic Federation. In time Wilson would also attempt to improve relations with Egypt as it was

⁶¹⁰ Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970* p 1 and 220.

⁶¹¹ Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970* p 128.

⁶¹² Healey, *The Time of My Life* p 281.

⁶¹³ Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War* p 85 and Kyle, *Suez* p 561.

⁶¹⁴ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation* p 290.

⁶¹⁵ TNA, CAB 148/10 Memorandum by the Foreign Office for the DOP(O)C on Report of the Long Term Study Group – Regional Study on the Middle East, 21 October 1964.

thought that these measures might provide the impetus for a negotiated settlement.⁶¹⁶ IRD files reveal that this decision confounded the Information Advisor, Tony Ashwood, because it ran counter to the strategy of encouraging “dissent and disaffection” between the different nationalist groups.⁶¹⁷ This new evidence highlights the effect that policy changes in London could have on political warfare in South Arabia.⁶¹⁸ In this case the covert subversion of insurgent groups by IRD now ran counter to efforts to accommodate dissidents. Labours attempt at a rapprochement with some nationalist elements may be criticised because it did not align with the locally derived political warfare strategy. In hindsight it forms part of the evolution of the Governments East of Suez policy. Arguably this took too long to formulate and was something that Wilson recorded his regret over in his memoirs.⁶¹⁹ The situation at the time appeared to be at impasse, with the Government as yet unwilling to withdraw from the Aden base but unable to devise a political formula that would secure its continued presence.

Whilst debate continued about the violent subversion of the Federation, the covert action in Yemen continued to provide a way to confront President Nasser without resorting to open conflict.⁶²⁰ In this manner, covert operations fitted into the methods of political warfare, providing a way that Britain could use targeted violence to achieve its political ends. The deniable British Field Liaison Force, a cover name for the mercenaries in Yemen, avoided the international criticism that British operations were drawing across the border.⁶²¹ Even with a change of government which was less ideologically inclined to bolster the Royalists, support for covert action continued. This was because, the Government recognised that forcing Nasser to leave the Yemen would make any later withdrawal from Aden appear less like a defeat.⁶²² It is tempting to speculate that greater support for covert activities could have provided a solution to safeguarding South Arabia. It is not simply hindsight that informs this assessment. Keeping President Nasser’s forces contained, was more likely to affect the terrorist campaign in South Arabia because it was from Yemen that the Egyptian’s trained and supplied the anti-British, Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) and National Liberation Front (NLF).

⁶¹⁶ TNA, PREM 13/1923 Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Representatives of the United Arab Republic, 28 June 1965.

⁶¹⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Ashworth report to Counter Subversion Committee, 25 June 1965, FCO 168/1539 Ashworth to IRD, 24 July 1965 and The War Office, *Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 5.

⁶¹⁸ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Letter to DDFP from GSO 1 Civil Affairs, 16 May 1965.

⁶¹⁹ Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970* p 243.

⁶²⁰ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War* p 86.

⁶²¹ French, *The British Ways in Counter-Insurgency 1945-67* p 240.

⁶²² Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 130.

Delicate direction was required if the covert operations in Yemen were to successfully assist British interests. Nasser's anti-British efforts needed to be kept focused on South Arabia to protect other strategically significant sites in Libya and Cyprus, whilst recognising that any action in Yemen had to be kept below overt warfare to prevent international condemnation and escalation.⁶²³ The Government feared escalation, lest it lead to Egypt's Soviet supporters intervening, not unrealistic given their military assistance in Yemen previously.⁶²⁴ Therefore, there were undoubtedly limits to what could be achieved through supporting covert operations that "were never more than an irritant, rather than a danger to Egyptian forces".⁶²⁵ In ideal conditions British special forces would have acted as the facilitators of the Royalists, using personnel who could provide not only training but also medical support, intelligence gathering and in dire circumstances aerial bombardment.⁶²⁶ Such support would have contributed to the escalation that Britain feared. Further, the terrain did not favour the use of special forces in the way it did in the jungles of Indonesia during the contemporaneous 'Confrontation'.⁶²⁷

The 'Confrontation' was Britain's successful response to Indonesia's attempt to break up the Malaysian Federation. Indonesia sponsored a guerrilla movement in Borneo, which Britain successfully countered through a campaign that included the use of "aggressive propaganda".⁶²⁸ Britain's strategy during the 'Confrontation' had several elements similar to that of South Arabia. British actions were defensive in character but like South Arabia, made use of operations across an international border (as occurred in Yemen). The campaign was successful for a number of reasons but a major factor was that military and political activities were not "artificially separated".⁶²⁹ This was unlike the situation in South Arabia where the unpopular federation was not politically inclusive to the local population. Military operations in the areas also failed to adequately provide security. The failure to defeat the terrorists in South Arabia was far more obvious due to the areas accessibility by

⁶²³ Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) p 152. TNA, DEFE 13/570, Foreign Office memorandum, July 1964.

⁶²⁴ The signing of the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in March 1964 was tangible evidence of Soviet interest in the region and increased British alarm. Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 86. See also Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble* p 70 and Dina Rezk, *The Arab World and Western Intelligence: Analysing the Middle East, 1956-1981* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) p 145.

⁶²⁵ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War* p 112.

⁶²⁶ Hart-Davis, *The War that Never Was* p 229-234.

⁶²⁷ Emile Simpson, *War From the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat as Politics* (London: Hurst & Co, 2012) p 175.

⁶²⁸ Easter, "British Intelligence and Propaganda during the 'Confrontation', 1963-1966" p 83.

⁶²⁹ Simpson, *War From the Ground Up* p 175.

the international media. The border area between Borneo and Indonesia was covered by thick jungle making access far more difficult. For the military the terrain could be exploited through covert 'Claret' cross-border operations. These reduced guerrilla infiltration and allowed for better control of the indigenous population. In this way the target audiences' access to information could be controlled by the British and denied to the opposition. This was not possible in South Arabia where the population was exposed to highly persuasive Egyptian propaganda. The British were also lucky in the unstable Indonesian regime, which was not an attractive alternative to local leaders. Success during the 'Confrontation' was also enabled through effective intelligence provision that informed decision making and targeted propaganda effectively.⁶³⁰ This was a marked difference to South Arabia where poor intelligence did not support effective decision making and misdirected political warfare activities.

In a similar manner to 'Confrontation', limits were imposed on covert action in Yemen and tightly controlled through co-ordinating bodies such as the Joint Action Committee (JAC), staffed by senior British officials.⁶³¹ With the Aden Group out of government, their influence on strategy was greatly diminished. This almost certainly affected the way reports from the mercenaries inside Yemen were viewed by Government organisations such as the JAC and JIC.⁶³² With a dearth of intelligence or diplomatic sources inside Yemen it might be assumed that the material the mercenaries provided would be highly prized. SIS, for example, were quite happy to receive items of Soviet equipment captured by the mercenaries but the JIC was, rightly, raising concerns on information which appeared to exaggerate Royalist successes, whilst highlighting their deficiencies in arms.⁶³³ The JIC's perception was shaped by the Government Communication Headquarters' (GCHQ) breaking of Egyptian military communications.⁶³⁴ Although this provided an insight into Egyptian thinking, the dispersed Royalist forces, who lacked a comprehensive radio network, would have been harder to understand through this means. This was at a time when Royalist operations were significantly stretching Egyptian resolve as casualties mounted in Yemen and domestic support and economic crisis bit in Egypt.⁶³⁵ By ignoring or downplaying the significance of information from inside Yemen the

⁶³⁰ Easter, "British Intelligence and Propaganda during the 'Confrontation', 1963-1966" p 98.

⁶³¹ Jones, "Where the state feared to tread" p 732.

⁶³² Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 169.

⁶³³ Jones, "Where the State Feared to Tread" p 727. Rezk, *The Arab World and Western Intelligence* p 149.

⁶³⁴ Richard Aldrich, *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency* (London: Harper Press, 2010) p 164.

⁶³⁵ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble* p 232.

opportunity to seize on Nasser's failure was wasted. The JIC did not appreciate this because they mistrusted the reporting being brought out by the mercenaries – a significant failure of analysis by the JIC.⁶³⁶

The previous two years had seen a dramatic turn for British fortunes in South Arabia. The declaration of the state of emergency should have caused a redefinition of the British campaign from one of counter-subversion to counter-insurgency. Instead, events in South Arabia continued to be viewed through the lens of fighting Nasserite inspired Arab nationalism. A more comprehensive campaign framework might have better integrated and coordinated British political warfare during this period but this approach was unlikely to have altered the eventual outcome. This was because what was required would have been the significant investment in building the Federal state, the neglect of which predated the Wilson Government but continued.⁶³⁷ Whilst resources for such a stabilisation effort were limited a decisive decision to pursue this course of action or to withdraw would have been preferable to the messy and drawn-out events that were to follow. These events would challenge British propaganda as its narrative of defending the Federation was tested by the palpable lack of security. Attempting to pursue gestures of goodwill in these circumstances and with limited financial resources meant even fewer community relations projects being undertaken. Under Tony Ashworth the Information Advisors activities had become tactically focused on short term and covert gains. This limited the overall impact of them and meant “that Labour had the worst of both worlds” as attempts at a diplomatic negotiation with President Nasser were thwarted by covert operations that undermined any sense of “good faith” by the British.⁶³⁸

Ever Changing Policy, 1965-1967

In the middle of 1965, the aims for British propaganda were defined by the new High Commissioner, Sir Richard Turnbull. These were:

“[T]o improve the British image; to persuade the people of the Federation to accept the retention of the British base; to promote the closet accord between Britain and the Federation; to denigrate and undermine those forces who oppose [us]...; to encourage the people of South Arabia to regard their

⁶³⁶ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War* p 227.

⁶³⁷ Worrall, “Between Withdrawal and Greater Engagement in Brehony and Jones (Eds) *Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia* p 165.

⁶³⁸ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 113.

Federation as an entity and be loyal to it...; to reveal the falsity of the allegations made by Cairo and Sana'a against Britain and the Federation and to emphasise the colonialist aspirations of Egypt."⁶³⁹

Aims such as these should have remained relatively consistent as they set the framework for a British 'narrative'. Political decisions in London that made changes to the plan would affect the story that political warfare activities crafted in order to shape and therein control the population. This is of course what would happen and subsequent changes to Britain's long-term and even short-term support to the Federation, affected the cooperation and support of it by the local population. Attempts to synchronise activities across the spectrum of political warfare was made much more difficult by Government decision making. These policy changes were reasonable in light of changing circumstances, but they resulted in disconnected policy and strategy that came to a head during the period 1965-1967. Whilst the political warfare activities focused on attacking the terrorist groups and President Nasser, the inability to improve the security situation failed to convince undecided elements of the population to support the British.

Tony Ashworth, the Information Advisor in Aden reported to the Counter Subversion Committee in June 1965 that there had been a "complete change" to Britain's position in South Arabia, with an anti-British government now in charge of Aden.⁶⁴⁰ A DFP report from the same time noted that, "[t]here are things that can be done – some that should have been done years ago – and if we wait six months until we get a firm statement of policy it will almost certainly be too late".⁶⁴¹ Changes in direction from London were unfortunately evident, as following a visit by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Anthony Greenwood, Ashworth had been "forbidden" from attacking the Egyptians nor showing support for the Royalists in Yemen.⁶⁴² IRD files record Ashworth's evident displeasure with this decision. On a visit to the East Aden Protectorate, he wrote of his astonishment that no British or Federal propaganda was being distributed but on "most of the walls are large portraits of President Nasser!".⁶⁴³ He drew the conclusion that this was an outcome of Greenwood's direction. A "gradual and orderly withdrawal from the Middle East" was now being discussed in Whitehall and the overseas departments (the FO, CO

⁶³⁹ TNA, CO 1035/213 South Arabia: Propaganda, undated but recorded as received, 22 February 1965.

⁶⁴⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Counter Subversion Committee Working Group on Aden, 25 June 1965.

⁶⁴¹ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Richmond to Wild, 16 May 1965.

⁶⁴² TNA, DEFE 28/147 South Arabia – Propaganda, 9 July 1965.

⁶⁴³ TNA, FCO 168/1540 Ashworth to IRD (Elwell) and Regional Information Office Beirut, 21 October 1965.

and Ministry of Defence (MOD)) concluded that a withdrawal from South Arabia specifically was the only way to promote a political settlement.⁶⁴⁴

The new direction not to attack the Egyptians was an attempt to prevent “[a]ll-out political warfare between Egypt and ourselves [the British] ...despite his [Nasser’s] murderous plotting in Aden”.⁶⁴⁵ In November 1965 as part of the preparations for a UK Defence Review, the Cabinet made the decision to give up all defence facilities in South Arabia and withdraw upon the country becoming independent. It was envisaged that the decision would help in negotiations with the Arab nationalists and broker a compromise. In Aden the High Commissioner, Sir Richard Turnbull was now locked down in his official residency as the threat of assassination was so high. He spent his time firing improvised missiles at birds attempting to raid his flower beds.⁶⁴⁶ The High Commissioners reaction to the plan to withdraw was to point out that the Federation of South Arabia was an artificial construction of Britain designed to protect the base.⁶⁴⁷ To withdraw would be to abandon the very people they had persuaded to join them in the project but this resulted from a number of factors. The continued support of the traditional rulers into the 1960s had ignored other political elements. The wish of various British Governments to maintain the status quo in Southern Arabia had prevented a reappraisal of this strategy. The advancement of more radical, revolutionary, elements in the nationalist community had doomed the Governments attempt in 1964 and 65 at rapprochement with the various groups, who would soon turn on each other. The political warfare campaign to either build support for the Federation or generate support for Britain’s presence had failed. British troops who were based in Aden for rapid deployment elsewhere now had to focus on defending themselves. In these circumstances the decision to withdraw is understandable but the timing of its execution would be critical and an area where political warfare activities might still prove useful.

In December 1965 the JIC were asked to assess the impact of when the British withdrawal was announcement.⁶⁴⁸ The JIC correctly predicted that Nasser would use Britain’s announced withdrawal as a propaganda victory. Now with a better understanding of the situation in Yemen, the intelligence community could tell policy makers that Republican

⁶⁴⁴ TNA, CAB 128/39 Cabinet minutes, 23 September 1965 and Ashton, *False Prophets* p 113.

⁶⁴⁵ TNA, CAB 130/213 Letter by Trend on Defence Review, 8 November 1965.

⁶⁴⁶ Stephen Harper, *Last Sunset* (London: Collins, 1978) p 71.

⁶⁴⁷ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 145.

⁶⁴⁸ TNA, CAB 158/60 JIC (65) 92 The Effects in the Middle East of an Announcement of a British Withdrawal from South Arabia in 1967 or 1968, 23 December 1965.

and Egyptian forces were bogged down by Royalists attacks. Egyptian military support was also increasingly unpopular back home and President Nasser had already agreed to remove his forces by the middle of 1966. The JIC warned that by announcing a withdrawal, the British handed victory in Yemen to Nasser. Further, whilst an early announcement might help negotiations with the Nationalist opposition, the JIC identified that it would not help the security situation.⁶⁴⁹ Although the JIC support to policy formation is important here this is also evidence of the continuation of British officials not fully comprehending the motivation of the terrorists in South Arabia. The result of this was far greater than the early or late announcement of British withdrawal. Attempts to negotiate with one Arab nationalist leader, Abdullah al Asnag had already come to nothing and as a by-product the ATUC moved away from their previous non-violent stance. As a result, Nasser was able to better coordinate the various Arab nationalist groups, including tribal groups who had fought in the Radfan, disgruntled Federation rulers and the ATUC's political wing the PSP. In hindsight, lacking a detailed knowledge of these events and misunderstanding the ideological changes in the Arab Nationalist movement, British ministers and officials could have had little comprehension as to the consequences of their actions.⁶⁵⁰

The shift in British policy, now to a withdrawal, gave "a new rationale for perpetuation of the Egyptian occupation of Yemen" and actually inflamed the situation making conditions for the British and the local population worse, not better.⁶⁵¹ If, as has been argued, Labour announced the withdrawal because they felt it was "hindering rapprochement of local nationalists", then it didn't work.⁶⁵² Similarly the denial of any cross-border operations from South Arabia into Yemen beyond what had already been authorised only limited British freedom of action.⁶⁵³ Some historians have argued that the decision to withdraw and to limit covert action by the Labour Government were examples of a more liberal internationalist foreign policy.⁶⁵⁴ While this might be the case, to have successfully integrated the covert action in Yemen with the stability of South Arabia, British

⁶⁴⁹ Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 135.

⁶⁵⁰ Mawby, "Orientalism and the Failure of British Policy in the Middle East" p 341-341.

⁶⁵¹ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble* p 252.

⁶⁵² Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 146.

⁶⁵³ TNA, DEFE 28/167 Operations in the South Arabian Peninsula, 16 August 1966.

⁶⁵⁴ For further study of these factors see Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970* and Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World Volume 2: Labour's Foreign Policy Since 1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). See also Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* p 183-184.

Government support needed to continue (not necessarily increase).⁶⁵⁵ This would have kept the pressure on President Nasser whilst balancing the threat of escalation.⁶⁵⁶ Any settlement with local nationalists in South Arabia required a position from which to negotiate, limiting the supplies the groups were receiving from across the border was one way of achieving this. The British may not have controlled the situation fully in 1965-1966 but by not taking advantage of the opportunity in Yemen, they allowed Nasser to continue supplying the very terrorists they were fighting. This demonstrates the difficulty in cohering complex covert operations with other plans.⁶⁵⁷ Coordination of all activities in South Arabia was necessary if they were to equate to an overall campaign success.

The announcement that Britain would not maintain its base in Aden, released as part of the Defence White Paper in February 1966, represented the culmination of a long debate within Government.⁶⁵⁸ The decision had come down to a number of factors including the deteriorating security situation which affected the purpose of basing troops in Aden and economic necessity.⁶⁵⁹ The Prime Minister and Cabinet had wrestled with political and economic issues, the outcome of which also impacted defence spending.⁶⁶⁰ The most important concern of the Government was the threat of the pound being devalued.

Cautions notes not to attribute the announcement of the withdrawal from the Aden base and conflate it with the intensification of violence might be justifiable but it certainly placed the political warfare campaign in an almost untenable position.⁶⁶¹ The following month a FO note stated without irony that propaganda for South Arabia must further the aims of policy.⁶⁶² This would be difficult given the significant changes in policy over the previous months. Far from providing a platform for political mediation, the way the withdrawal was announced only emboldened the terrorists who now believed they needed to fight to win control of the political and security agenda, once the British left. They did this by thoroughly infiltrating the Federation structures, particularly the police and army whose “stability and loyalty” the DFP were attempting to foster.⁶⁶³ DFP records show that they

⁶⁵⁵ TNA, PREM 13/112 Healey to Colonial Secretary 1 April 1965.

⁶⁵⁶ TNA, DEFE 28/167 DFP Comment on Report by Chairman of SAAG, 16 December 1966. See also Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny* p 169.

⁶⁵⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/167 Chiefs of Staff Committee Defence Planning Staff, Operations in the South Arabian Peninsula, 15 August 1966.

⁶⁵⁸ Simon Smith, “Britain’s Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44:2 (2016) p 330.

⁶⁵⁹ TNA, CAB 130/213 The Defence Review: A Personal Note, 11 June 1965.

⁶⁶⁰ For an analysis of the reasoning behind these issues see: James, “Global Britain’s Strategic Problem East of Suez” p 180-185.

⁶⁶¹ Mawby, “The ‘Big Lie’ and the ‘Great Betrayal’” in Ashton (Ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East* p 174.

⁶⁶² TNA, CO 1035/342 Foreign Office Note on Propaganda Directive, 23 March 1965.

⁶⁶³ TNA, CO 1035/342 Wild to Aden Working Group on Counter-Subversion, 16 February 1966.

considered propaganda to the South Arabian Army “a most important tool” as the force was recruited from throughout the Federation.⁶⁶⁴ The DFP aimed to provide confidence not only to the Federal Army but also to spread messages to the wider community through its Arab members. DFP activities were coordinated by a British Army Major who was stationed in the Federal Ministry of Defence.⁶⁶⁵ A bi-lingual newspaper called *Gambia* was a popular publication but as a consequence of the unstable situation the advertising revenue that had previously paid for it significantly reduced in February 1966. Counter-subversion funds were then used to pay for it.⁶⁶⁶

In March 1966 the CSC recorded seven activities it was coordinating in South Arabia. These included the IRD and DFP operations but also the British Council and broadcasting service of the BBC.⁶⁶⁷ By April, Committee reports began to record the impact of the change in British policy with there now being no need to influence the police force after independence and that the formation of a Federal Special Branch had failed and the activity would cease.⁶⁶⁸ Frustrations were evident however and slipped into official reports which noted that, “[e]xperience...has shown that an effective campaign cannot be sustained unless there are well defined political guidelines, adequate financial and manpower backing, and control of operations by a single authority.”⁶⁶⁹ These were evidently not present in South Arabia. The point on control of operations does not appear to have been heeded. DFP files record that whilst the JAC had been established to coordinate “special operations in areas of military interest” the CSC was to study “activities other than special operations”.⁶⁷⁰ These unclear lines of delineation led to the establishment of yet another coordination body, the South Arabian Action Group (SAAG). This did nothing to reduce the bureaucracy involved in political warfare as Whitehall departments remained the ultimate authority for the execution of operations which could cause delays, misunderstanding and missed opportunities.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁴ Jonathan Walker, “The South Arabian Army – A Poisoned Chalice?” in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds) *Britain’s Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 96. The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁶⁶⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/169 Information Adviser to Wild, 4 January 1963 and DEFE 28/164 Wild to Hancock, 6 August 1963.

⁶⁶⁶ TNA, CO 1035/342 Wild to Aden Working Group on Counter-Subversion, 16 February 1966.

⁶⁶⁷ TNA, CO 1035/342 Annex A Counter Subversion Committee Working Group on Aden, 11 March 1966.

⁶⁶⁸ TNA, CAB 182/155 Aden and the Federation of South Arabia: Assistance to Police Forces, 13 April 1966.

⁶⁶⁹ TNA, DEFE 28/150 Notes by the Ministry of Defence, The projected Redeployment from Aden to the Persian Gulf, Counter Subversion, 18 March 1966.

⁶⁷⁰ TNA, DEFE 28/143 Counter Subversion Annex C to DFP 212/1, 4 May 1967.

⁶⁷¹ TNA, DEFE 28/147 Richmond to Wild, 3 May 1965 and Cormac, “Coordinating Covert Action” p 710.

Whilst the establishment of the SAAG potentially helped to better process requests for activity through to Whitehall departments political warfare activity, in general, was pushing against Government policy. The focus of political warfare during the first half of 1966 remained predominantly on getting the Egyptians out of Yemen. It was believed this was the “dominating and exceptional factor in the South Arabian situation” and without the Egyptian presence across the border “the new Federation might be able to work out its own salvation”.⁶⁷² The appointment of a new Foreign Secretary, George Brown, in the summer of 1966 did not change the focus for the IRD or DFP but it did lead to an interesting, if inconclusive, example of unconventional diplomacy.⁶⁷³ Brown was known to be pro-Arab and this created some friction with both British and Federal officials.⁶⁷⁴ His correspondence with Nasser earned him the nickname of “Nasser’s pen pal”.⁶⁷⁵ That Brown should have written “cajoling letters to Nasser, appealing to his better nature for helping to keep the peace in South Arabia” seems to tie in with the opinion that he was “surely one of the worst Foreign Secretaries of the century”.⁶⁷⁶ Opinion is however, divided with one historian seeing him as having “had real vision about Britain’s international role and favouring an early withdrawal from bases east of Suez and entry to the EEC”.⁶⁷⁷ Rather like Harold Wilson, Brown had two sides to his character; on the one he could be charming, bombastic and potentially visionary, on the other he was a drunk, unpredictable and could be extremely unpleasant.⁶⁷⁸ These character flaws have made him more of a figure of fun than a serious political figure.⁶⁷⁹ Brown considered that as Nasser was supporting the insurgents in the Federation and his forces were present in Yemen, he was the source of problems and therefore, dealing directly with him might provide different options. Although Brown was able to ask Nasser to halt the anti-British propaganda of Voice of the Arabs, the “putative détente” did not alter events in South Arabia.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷² TNA, DEFE 28/167 Operations in the South Arabian Peninsula, 15 August 1966 and DEFE 28/160 SAAG Report, 31 October-12 November 1966.

⁶⁷³ FCO 168/2161 Ashworth to IRD, 26 October 1966 and DEFE 28/167 DFP/303 Notes on Anti-Nasser Action Through SAAG.

⁶⁷⁴ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 114.

⁶⁷⁵ Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 15.

⁶⁷⁶ Kelly, *Arabia, The Gulf & the West*, p 28 and Anthony Adamthwaite, “Anglo-French relations and Britain’s Second EEC Membership Bid” in Oliver Daddow (Ed) *Harold Wilson and European Integration* (London: Frank Cass, 2002) p169, quoted in Young, *Labour Governments 1964-1970* p 8.

⁶⁷⁷ Young, *Labour Governments 1964-1970* p 7.

⁶⁷⁸ See Peter Paterson, *Tired and Emotional: the life of Lord George Brown* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) for numerous examples.

⁶⁷⁹ Further assessment of George Brown’s unconventional character has been provided by a collection of parliamentary papers published in 2013 by Prospect Magazine. Bronwen Maddox, ‘George of Arabia’, *Prospect Magazine* 21 March 2013, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/george-brown-middle-east-tour-nasser-shah-iran> accessed on 17 June 2018.

⁶⁸⁰ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 115.

As a result of Britain's persistent balance of payments problems, the fiscal situation deteriorated during the summer of 1966. Due to an unsustainable drain on its reserves and speculation against the pound the government took increasingly stringent measures to cut costs. Over the course of a year (1966-1967) the Government would conduct a series of defence expenditure reviews as they attempted to reduce costs quickly. In Aden the security situation had deteriorated yet further and George Brown took the decision to remove Sir Richard Turnbull and replace him as High Commissioner with Humphrey Trevelyan. Trevelyan was an experienced diplomat, who had been Ambassador to Egypt and Iraq, and was thought to bring a "dose of Foreign Office realpolitik" to secure Britain's withdrawal.⁶⁸¹ The attempted rapprochement with President Nasser had failed but so had central Government's support for "the creation and exploitation of every opportunity to frustrate the UAR [United Arab Republic] activities" through political warfare.⁶⁸² Even overt support and preparedness of the Federal forces and Government were reduced with plans for films that would demonstrate the effectiveness of the Federal Regular Army vetoed due to the cost.⁶⁸³ All that mattered now was get out as early as possible.

The decision to grant independence to South Arabia was taken by the Cabinet on 13 March 1967 with all British forces being withdrawn as quickly as possible.⁶⁸⁴ There had been a provision for British military support being provided to South Arabia for six months after independence but this was withdrawn when the Federal Government rejected the initial offer and attempted to negotiate for a conditions-based withdrawal. This was firmly rebuffed by George Brown who proposed a compromise over the actual date of independence but there remained no defence guarantee.⁶⁸⁵ Two significant events precipitated the retreat, the first being Egypt's defeat in the Six Day War of June 1967 which was followed by the second, when a mutiny broke out in the Federation army and police ten days later. The Arab defeat by Israel led to accusations of British complicity in the initial stages of the war and became known as the 'Big Lie'. A report on the state of the South Arabian Army was published by the DFP on 20 June (the same day as the mutiny).⁶⁸⁶ The follow up letter from Major Bartlett (the DFP officer assigned to the

⁶⁸¹ Mawby, *British policy in Aden and the Protectorate 1955-67* p 156.

⁶⁸² TNA, FCO 168/2161 Ashworth to IRD, 26 October 1966.

⁶⁸³ TNA, DEFE 28/167 Operations in the South Arabian Peninsula, 16 Aug 1967 and FCO 95/330 Ashworth to IRD, 24 Feb 1967.

⁶⁸⁴ TNA, CAB 148/42 Cabinet Minutes, 13 March 1967.

⁶⁸⁵ TNA, CAB 148/42 Cabinet Minutes, 11 May 1967.

⁶⁸⁶ TNA, DEFE 28/161 The Impact of Recent Events in the Middle East on the South Arabian Army, 20 June 1967.

Federal Ministry of Defence) noted that the date of the report was unfortunate but that the mutiny was as a result of the conflation of various issues.⁶⁸⁷ Whilst the reasons behind the mutiny were complicated the event was a damning indictment of the failure of a central aim of political warfare, that of giving confidence to the local people in the Federal Government.⁶⁸⁸

The contents of recently released IRD files, provide a final insight into a key figure in the political warfare campaign and the effects of British policy in South Arabia. In a letter to IRD an unnamed government official (possibly from the Security Service) wrote that Tom Driberg, a journalist, Labour MP and probable Soviet intelligence agent had made a complaint to the Foreign Officer about Tony Ashworth. Driberg had apparently been convinced by al Asnag, the creator of FLOSY to make the complaint.⁶⁸⁹ Driberg alleged that Ashworth had deliberately contrived for a UN delegation to be badly treated by the Federation Government. A satirical article in the magazine *Private Eye* about the visit by the UN officials was also suspected of being sponsored by Driberg.⁶⁹⁰ The High Commissioner, Humphrey Trevelyan rallied to Ashworth's defence writing, "[i]t is understandable that such journalists who were exaggeratedly partial to Egypt might have resented the superb way in which Ashworth has carried out Her Majesty's Government's policy".⁶⁹¹ Ashworth was not sacked as was suggested at one point and had already been awarded the OBE for his work in South Arabia.⁶⁹² At the same time as Ashworth was being lambasted in *Private Eye*, he was lobbying IRD to set aside monies to pay for a member of Aden Radio to leave South Arabia. The unnamed individual had come under intense personal intimidation and was likely to be further threatened after independence.⁶⁹³ In a final example of the bureaucratic machinations of the Whitehall establishment, IRD refused to set aside any funds as they considered the operation of "dubious value".⁶⁹⁴ In

⁶⁸⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/161 Bartlett to Wild, 26 June 1967 and Walker, "The South Arabian Army – A Poisoned Chalice?" p 100.

⁶⁸⁸ The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁶⁸⁹ TNA, FCO 168/2754 Unknown author to Elwell 24 April 1967. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Allen Lane, 1999) p 522-526.

⁶⁹⁰ TNA, FCO 168/2544 IRD to Ashworth, 12 May 1967.

⁶⁹¹ TNA, FCO 168/2754 Falle to Duncan, 15 June 1967.

⁶⁹² The London Gazette, *New Year Honours 1967, Diplomatic and Overseas List* p 21:

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/44210/supplement/1>.

⁶⁹³ TNA, FCO 168/2545 Ashworth to IRD, 16 April 1967.

⁶⁹⁴ TNA, FCO 168/2545 Aden Radio, 4 May 1967. See hand written note on reverse of document by 'Pridham', 25 May 1967.

October 1967 Ashworth recorded that the funds had been provided by the High Commissioner, although it is unclear what ultimately happened to the individual.⁶⁹⁵

Power rapidly flowed away from the Federation Government as it and the South Arabian Army were steady infiltration by the NLF. The tough and locally recruited NLF fighters took the initiative and between August and October 1967 took control of much of the central part of South Arabia. When the South Arabian Army was requested to deploy to the area it simply refused. The NLF commander, Muhammad Ali Haitham, had established links to junior officers who now emerged to organise cadres.⁶⁹⁶ The High Commissioner was so convinced of the NLF power that he opened negotiations to hand over South Arabia to them. Despite the groups Marxist ideology, Trevelyan ever the diplomat considered the NLF to be “more pragmatic in negotiating post-independence relations” with the UK.⁶⁹⁷ In November power was transferred to the first Marxist government in the Middle East and the country was renamed the People’s Republic of South Yemen.

Conclusion

The records of the IRD and DFP show that political warfare was part of Britain’s strategy in South Arabia from the 1950s until the withdrawal in 1967. This makes its study of continuing interest to historians and offers the opportunity to identify fresh insights on a controversial episode in British decolonisation. The Government used propaganda, psychological and special operations to shield the political entity it created in an effort to continue its influence in the region. Even as the situation changed, political warfare activities were never significantly altered. Whilst Government policy reacted to changing circumstances, political warfare activities did not. Although the recently released files of the IRD show an increasingly aggressive political warfare campaign, the British strategy was actually largely defensive using a counter-subversive methodology more than a counter-insurgency one. The phases of the campaign identified through the structure of this chapter, do not follow those of the major pacification campaign fought in Malaya nor that of the state building one in Oman (analysed in the next chapter). The defensive strategy is understandable when, “Britain had to manage its position in the Middle East in such a way as to protect its interests, through minimizing antagonism with Nasser and

⁶⁹⁵ TNA, FCO 168/2545 Ashworth to Elwell, 10 October 1967.

⁶⁹⁶ Walker, “The South Arabian Army – A Poisoned Chalice?” p 103.

⁶⁹⁷ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 117.

censure from the international community”.⁶⁹⁸ As policy evolved however, had a process of investment to develop a workable state been implemented earlier or a decisive counter-insurgency strategy been deployed a more representative local government may have emerged. It is understandable that British politicians and officials, who had to balance issues beyond those solely relating to South Arabia, adjusted policy to changing circumstances. That it took so long for changes to occur was the result of several reasons, but it meant that the political warfare campaign was less calibrated and delivered in a piecemeal fashion. Although “extremely successful”, covert action in Yemen was not effectively integrated with other elements of political warfare to influence the outcome in South Arabia.⁶⁹⁹ It therefore did not lead to the Government reaping the benefits of its efforts. With external support to its enemies reduced, the British Government should have had greater time and space to consolidate the Federation of South Arabia. Therefore, this is not why British political warfare failed in South Arabia.

The fresh evidence of IRD tactics amplifying divisions in opposition groups through covert means demonstrates a greater use of unattributable propaganda than previously thought. There was however a disconnect between such negative tactics and pursuing a successful outcome to the campaign. The focus for political warfare through such activity was to covertly counter President Nasser, rather than investing in developing South Arabia. British strategy should have been aligned to pursue a more positive offer to the people of South Arabia. A DFP report written after the campaign offers new evidence in support of this conclusion. It recorded that although there had been some success in discrediting President Nasser, psychological operations (and by dint, political warfare) had failed to give confidence to the Federation Government or the local population.⁷⁰⁰ This was an error and one where greater financial investment in political warfare was unlikely to have made a difference. The fundamental issue was that the local population were presented with a choice between local Arab fighters and “a British supported “stooge” government”.⁷⁰¹

That this choice occurred was as a result of a lack of coherence between policy and strategy. The inconsistency of Government policy, based upon a fundamental lack of

⁶⁹⁸ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 117.

⁶⁹⁹ Rezk, *The Arab World and Western Intelligence* p 165 and Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 151.

⁷⁰⁰ The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

understanding the South Arabian setting, was an important reason but more so were the string of decisions that were taken as “London’s policy twisted and turned between the rival imperatives of solvency and prestige”.⁷⁰² The Labour Government inherited a poor political and security situation in 1964 and its inexperience and the very machinery of government meant the bold policy change to leave took time to finally be decided upon. The timing of the announcement that Britain would withdraw without offering continued protection to the Federation however, was crucial and the Government was responsible for that decision.⁷⁰³ This signalled a lack of support for the traditional rulers in the Federation, guaranteeing its failure and gave “new rationale for the perpetuation of the Egyptian occupation of Yemen”.⁷⁰⁴ Whilst political warfare may have amplified divisions in the opposition, how could it convince the undecided to support the Federation when the British Government clearly did not. Over the long-term British influence and prestige were significantly reduced by the retreat.⁷⁰⁵ In the short-term South Yemen welcomed the Soviet Union and China into an area of vital national interest for the West, disadvantageous to the UK in the wider Cold War. This also undermined Britain’s traditional supporters in the region; the leaders in the Gulf and the Shah of Iran.⁷⁰⁶ The outcomes of these events form the next case study in this thesis.

⁷⁰² John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 2013) p 379.

⁷⁰³ Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970* p 98 and 225-226.

⁷⁰⁴ Ferris, *Nasser’s Gamble* p 252.

⁷⁰⁵ Smith, “Britain’s Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf” p 339.

⁷⁰⁶ Kelly, “Vanishing Act” p 193.

Chapter Four – British Political Warfare’s Contribution to Counter Revolutionary Operations in Oman, 1968-1977

This chapter will analyse British political warfare as an element of the campaign in Oman. Building on the research and analysis in previous chapters, this study will investigate how political warfare was successfully applied to the campaign. Traditionally the conflict in Oman has been viewed through the operations of the SAS. However, recent scholarship has focused on the role of the Sultan of Oman’s Armed Forces (SAF) in conventional military operations that were led by a cohort of British advisors. Most recently the interpretation of the campaign as being either led by the SAS or as a model of a British hearts and minds campaign has been questioned.⁷⁰⁷ To understand the role of political warfare, this chapter will make use of material provided by a former SAS soldier, John Ward, who worked extensively on psychological operations in Oman.⁷⁰⁸ Ward was identified as ‘John Lane’ by Tony Jeapes in his account of the campaign.⁷⁰⁹ The information provided by Ward offers much greater detail on the techniques of political warfare waged in Oman. It shows the development of creative and culturally attuned activities which directly assisted other elements of the campaign. The availability of Ward’s recollections was timely as they could be combined with newly released records from the Information Research Department (IRD).⁷¹⁰ Through access to this new material it is possible to study British political warfare from the tactical to strategic level in Oman in a way that it previously was not. Both the recollections of John Ward and the new IRD material, allow the impact of political warfare on the campaign in Oman to be more comprehensively assessed. This new information makes it possible to add to the scholarship on the conflict, providing a more detailed explanation of political warfare in Oman and how it helped to change the way Britain engaged with the Middle East.

This thesis deliberately links the failure of the campaign in South Arabia with the development of the insurgency in Oman. This chapter continues to explore Britain’s use of political warfare in the Middle East between 1959-77. The political ramifications of the retreat from South Arabia affected the way that Britain would come to support the

⁷⁰⁷ Geraint Hughes, “A ‘Model Campaign’ Reappraised: The Counter-Insurgency War in Dhofar, Oman 1965-1975”, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32:2 (2009) p 273.

⁷⁰⁸ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013 and 21 February 2014.

⁷⁰⁹ Jeapes *SAS Secret War* p 36.

⁷¹⁰ IRD files on Oman released in 2019-2021 can be found at The National Archives under the file series’, FCO 168 and 174.

Sultanate, through a covert programme of assistance rather than overt intervention. Political and economic constraints therefore had an impact on Britain's freedom of action. Britain's political warfare capability was reorganised after the withdrawal from South Arabia. The reduction in political warfare capabilities was part of a drawn-out rebalancing away from a global role to a more European focused one. That Britain intervened in Oman, albeit in a hidden fashion, was because it considered that the fall of the Sultan's Government to a Marxist insurgency would significantly damage its national interests namely: the need to secure the oil resources of the Gulf, maintenance of regional security and the ideological impetus of the Cold War. Strategic calculation and campaign planning were important elements of the Dhofar conflict and demonstrate more effective synchronisation of activities, especially political warfare, than had been the case in South Arabia. As such this chapter builds upon the previous one in helping to answer, why Britain failed in South Arabia but succeeded in Oman.

As with the previous chapter, the campaign has been broken into phases that provide the structure. It is important to set events in the wider context, which will be covered in the first part of the chapter with a focus on the developing crisis in Oman. The deposing of Sultan Said by his son in 1970 was a critical moment in the campaign and the need to legitimise the new rule of Sultan Qaboos and the counter-revolution against the insurgency from 1970 form the second phase. Political warfare would be a key element of helping to legitimise the new Sultan in the eyes of his people and the international community. This saw the deployment of British led psychological operations in Oman and propaganda externally to support the new regime. A key part of countering the insurgency was for the Omani Government's authority to be re-established in the province of Dhofar. The military led operations during the period 1971-1973 form the third phase with political warfare playing a significant role in changing the perception, and therein behaviours towards the state, of the Dhofar population. The insurgency was finally extinguished between 1974-77 through military gains and civic development, which was made possible because of the country's increased oil revenue. This last phase saw the start of a change in the way that Britain engaged with Oman and the Gulf as it ostensibly withdrew but continued to hold a degree of influence in the region.

Background

Oman's position on the south-west corner of the Arabian Peninsula meant it had long held a significant geostrategic value. The Strait of Hormuz, a 30-mile-wide gap at the entrance to the Persian Gulf was (and remains) a vital waterway through which Middle Eastern oil was transported to the international markets. In the 1960s, more than sixty per cent of the Western world's crude oil came from the Gulf with a super tanker passing through the straits approximately every 10 minutes. The securing of access to this vital resource was of national interest to Britain and hence a stable Oman was considered a necessity. Britain had a long-established relationship with Oman which had been formalised through the Treaty of Friendship in 1798. A Muscat Sultanate had been established in 1792; having a single ruler for such an important area benefited Britain's political and economic interests in the Gulf and India.⁷¹¹ This is why Britain continued to support the Said dynasty through the nineteenth and twentieth century. This support culminated with the guarantee of British protection in 1886. The country was very much part of Britain's informal empire in the Middle East and since the 1870s, British advisors were extremely close to the Sultan and the seat of power in the east of the country. Whilst there were cordial relations between the Sultan and the British, the dynamic of an autocratic regime and the rest of the country remained unresolved, particularly as the elected Imamate in the interior of Oman created an alternative centre of power to rival that of the Sultan. The question of sovereignty in Oman came to a head in the twentieth century. The 1920 Treaty of Al-Sib created a fragile understanding between the Sultan and the Imam but this rapidly unravelled after the death of Imam al-Khalili in 1954.⁷¹² His successor Ghalib al-Hinai asserted that the Imamate was a sovereign entity and began issuing passports and applied for membership of the Arab League. This was during the heyday of Arab nationalism which had contributed to a flurry of states within the region seeking self-determination.

The Jebel Akhdar revolt between 1954 and 1959 saw the Imam (Ghalib al-Hinai) attempt to prevent the unification of the Sultanate of Muscat and the rest of Oman. Between 1957 and 1959 the British intervened militarily, beating the rebellion in favour of the Sultan.⁷¹³ In late 1957 a psychological warfare team was deployed from Aden, "augmenting and

⁷¹¹ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 111.

⁷¹² Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) p 94-95.

⁷¹³ Newsinger, *British Counter-Insurgency* p 32.

increasing the effectiveness of conventional military operations”.⁷¹⁴ They were also sent as a way to limit the overall number of British troops deployed, in an attempt to avoid attracting condemnation post the Suez crisis.⁷¹⁵ A report from June 1958 recorded that as well as leaflets, voice aircraft (fitted with a loud speaker system to broadcast over a wide area) and film projection, the psychological warfare team were also able to assist with tactical deception during Operation Passion Waggon.⁷¹⁶ The impact of psychological warfare in the campaign is questionable. Its support to conventional operations was potentially useful but as would be the case in South Arabia, its effect was never quantified. A draft DFP paper from after the campaign recorded that further trouble was likely and “[t]here appears to be a great opportunity for the carrying out straight away of a vigorous psychological warfare and propaganda campaign”.⁷¹⁷ The objective of such a campaign would be to deter the rebels and therein secure the Sultan and Britain’s interests. Evidently this campaign was not carried out. Whilst the usefulness of psychological warfare was difficult to judge, as a result of the overall successful campaign, an exchange of letters between Britain and the Sultan occurred in 1958. This agreement saw Britain second military officers to run the newly created SAF as a way of continuing British influence in Oman. These seconded personnel included the Commander of the Sultan’s Armed Forces and by the late 1960s all the main military and many civilian positions were filled by the British. This provided the British Government with significant influence over Omani Government decision making.⁷¹⁸

The advantageous Anglo-Omani relationship continued during the 1960s and in some respects, there were similarities with the British Government’s approach to maintaining relationships in Oman and the two Aden Protectorates. Both Oman and the Protectorates were part of Britain’s informal empire, and both received limited resources or encouragement towards civil development - in the case of the Protectorates through the Colonial Office (CO) and in Oman by the Foreign Office (FO) Consul-General and then the Political Resident Persian Gulf. This system had an inherent weakness in its informality in that the British Government were either unwilling or unable to intervene to change

⁷¹⁴ TNA, DEFE 28/14 Psychological Warfare Resources, 7 July 1958.

⁷¹⁵ TNA, DEFE 28/15 Isaac to Magrath, 3 June 1959 quoted in Bennett “Words are Cheaper than Bullets” p 7.

⁷¹⁶ Unfortunately, there is no further information on this particular operation in the DFP files. TNA DEFE 28/14 Psychological Warfare – Muscat and Oman, 6 June 1958.

⁷¹⁷ TNA, DEFE 28/14 Draft Commanders Report on Operations in Oman 1957-59, undated.

⁷¹⁸ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 41-42 and Simon C Smith, “America in Britain’s Place?: Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Suez Crisis”, *The Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10:3 (2012) p 262.

direction in the same way as they could under a system of direct rule. The Dhofar insurgency that came close to destabilising the regime of the Sultan originated as a tribal rebellion caused primarily because of the poor governance of Sultan Said bin Taimur. As they had done in South Arabia the British dealt with the highest level of the state (the Sultan) and through it were able to wield significant influence but with no meaningful way to alter their actions beyond suggestion. British Government records note that Sultan Said was “a complex and difficult character”, but one who the British could not force into creating meaningful political, social or economic development for the population.⁷¹⁹

By the late 1960s Sultan Said received approximately half of his income from the British Government and all but one of his ministers was British. In this situation it may appear paradoxical that there were still limits to British action in Oman but ultimately the Sultan was the head of state. When, after the Jebel uprising in the late 1950s, the British had wanted to pursue the development of not only the Armed Forces but also civil aid for the people, this had been rejected by the Sultan. The Sultan’s unwillingness to modernise does not appear to be because of a lack of exposure to the modern world as he travelled widely.⁷²⁰ The Sultan himself suggested that religion was a reason citing, “in the interests of his deeply religious people changes should be gradual”.⁷²¹ The costs of development could have been another factor. Sultan Said had ousted his father in 1932 because of the latter’s financial incompetence, and he was known as disliking economic expenditure - having previously found it difficult to balance his budget during the 1930s. None of these reasons seem to provide a complete explanation.⁷²² Recent scholarship has noted the influence of Sultan Said’s six years as a student in Rajasthan where he had been exposed to the Maharaja style of governance.⁷²³ This may have imbued the Sultan with the notion that he was immune from the needs of the people and needed to isolate himself from them.

The 1964 election of a Labour Government on a mandate of social and economic change did not immediately alter British engagement with the Government of Oman. Whilst recognising that continued stability in the Gulf was important to British interests, the tone of engagement did shift offering “some limited assistance but to keep the Sultan at arm’s

⁷¹⁹ TNA WO 32/21131 Folio 26, Minute from Foreign Secretary to Defence Secretary 1970.

⁷²⁰ Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (London: Saqi, 2002) p 272.

⁷²¹ *Ibid* p 276.

⁷²² Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 42.

⁷²³ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 144.

length”.⁷²⁴ This isolation of the Sultan from his people and even Britain’s arm’s length support actually made any attempt at evolutionary steps in a system of government far harder than had a different system been encouraged at this point. In a system where the Sultan held ultimate power, there was little the British Government could do but continue to try and influence the Sultan’s attitude. If that failed and the situation changed then the British Government would need to pursue a different course of action to secure their interests.

The Devaluation of the Pound and British Interests in the Middle East

As described in the previous chapter, Britain had withdrawn from South Arabia in November 1967, handing the government over to what would become the Marxist People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). That same month an economic blow was dealt to British prestige, probably as significant as the Suez crisis, when the Government was forced to devalue sterling.⁷²⁵ This was the culmination of months of activity by the Government to maintain the pound’s value against the Dollar. The closure of the Suez Canal as a consequence of the Six Day War, had hit British exports and fuelled the continuing balance of payments problem just as the pound came under pressure on the foreign exchange markets. The Chancellor, Jim Callaghan, concluded that devaluation was the only measure available and the Cabinet agreed to his recommendations on 17 November 1967.

The devaluation had major implications for Britain’s activities in the Middle East. Large public spending cuts were part of the Government’s plan to halt the economic crisis and stabilise the pound. The cuts in public spending were particularly hard for defence expenditure with its large capital projects, expense of materials and the cost of overseas bases. The implications for defence commitments were considered by the Cabinet on 4 January 1968 and based on an assumed withdrawal from all commitments East of Suez by 1971. Although the Cabinet debated the decision for some hours it was the Prime Minister who took the final decision for withdrawal. Previously Wilson had been a strong advocate of Britain’s continuing East of Suez role but it was now decided that Britain would leave by the end of the 1970-71 financial year. The decision was received extremely badly

⁷²⁴ TNA FCO 371/174489, Dispatch Luce to Walker, 11 November 1964. See also Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 60.

⁷²⁵ Ashton, *False Prophets* p 135.

by the Gulf rulers who had been assured the previous November that Britain would not abandon them. A similar reaction came from the Americans who were heavily committed to the war in Vietnam and did not wish to take over responsibility for protecting Western interests in the Gulf too.

It would be easy to see the events of late 1967 and early 1968 as the pivotal moment in the decision to withdraw but actually successive Conservative and Labour policy reviews had not considered the East of Suez role sacrosanct. The view that the decision to withdraw was only made after the devaluation possibly stems from the published diaries of the Labour MP and Cabinet Minister, Richard Crossman. There are inconsistencies in his recording of events however.⁷²⁶ A more balanced view is that the devaluation of the pound was the accelerant for a decision which resulted from a decade of transformation to British foreign and defence policy, with ramifications for the interests in the Middle East and the use of political warfare.⁷²⁷ Relative economic decline and the rise of Arab nationalism had shown that Britain's conventional military capability was not simply expensive but also mismatched to deal with the region's threats. Forced by economic necessity to re-examine the level of resources for particular defence expenditure in the period 1966-68 profoundly changed the way Britain would now engage with the Middle East.

The Reorganisation of Britain's Political Warfare Capability

Part of the rationale for withdrawing military forces from East of Suez was not just expense. Labour Party thinking at the time was that Britain's military presence internationally could well fuel antagonism rather than providing a military or diplomatic advantage.⁷²⁸ It was argued by the Foreign Secretary, George Brown that there was little that Britain "could now...do to influence the way in which events moved" in the region.⁷²⁹ Less overt methods such as, propaganda, psychological and other special operations, were a way to pursue influence in the region, albeit in a more discreet manner. These

⁷²⁶ See for example contradictions in Crossman's diary recollections of the debate over the withdrawal. Richard Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, Vol II* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1976) p 635 and Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Minister of Housing, 1964-66, Vol I* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1976) p 570.

⁷²⁷ See chapter three of this thesis for the developments in British policy between 1959 and 1967 in relation to the Middle East and the use of political warfare in South Arabia.

⁷²⁸ Healey, *The Time of My Life* p 280.

⁷²⁹ TNA, CAB 128/42 Cabinet Minutes, 11 July 1967.

methods would be cheaper than the deployment of large numbers of conventional military forces but would ultimately see changes to Britain's long-standing position in the Gulf. They also affected the way that the campaign in Oman was fought.

Although military power had provided the ultimate guarantee of British influence in the Gulf, a sustained programme of countering subversion had been conducted. Recent scholarship has discovered an unattributable British radio station called *Voice of the Coast* operated in the Gulf. The station's output was designed differently to previous unattributable stations, in that it did not aim to directly challenge foreign propaganda but instead produced quality material through which an audience was attracted away from other stations.⁷³⁰ Further changes in Britain's ways of operating are revealed in the new IRD material. As Britain withdrew its physical presence from the Middle East it also drew down other capabilities including in the direct ownership of media platforms. Previously black radio stations such as the *Voice of the Coast* had been run covertly by the British. In another example, IRD made a request to the Reuters news agency in 1968, that it set up an office in the Middle East.⁷³¹ This news service aimed to influence the region's population through pro-British reporting of both local and world events. Reuters would be paid for its services through the BBC. By working through Reuters and the BBC, IRD could mask its involvement. The use of Reuters was also seen as financially prudent as it would allow the Government to close the Regional News Service (Middle East), as these services had become too expensive.⁷³² These examples illustrate attempts to reduce the overt British presence and costs whilst maintaining some ability to project influence, in this case through information services. This example also shows the previously unknown links that IRD had with some media organisations. In the 1960s the British Government had moved to hide its activities in the Middle East as its presence became an irritant to any remaining sphere of influence. By the end of the decade, in-house means proved too expensive and the Government discreetly began to contract out services. The political warfare campaign in Oman would follow a similar approach being small in scale, discreet in character and ultimately handed over to contracted personnel.

⁷³⁰ The station was ultimately handed over to the ruler of Dubai, broadcasting under its new name of Radio Dubai. Athol Yates, "Britain's Key Counter-Subversion Instrument Before the 1971 Withdrawal from the Gulf: *Voice of the Coast* [Sawt Al Saahil]", *Intelligence and National Security* (2022). p 12.

⁷³¹ Martin Rosenbaum, "How the UK secretly funded a Middle East news agency" *BBC News*, 13 January 2020: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-50637200>, accessed 21 February 2022. For the British Government documents relating to the Reuters news agency see TNA, FCO 168/3418, 3419 and 3420.

⁷³² TNA, FCO 168/3418 News Agency Services, 8 May 1968.

Financial consideration was beginning to constrain Britain's ability to deploy political warfare at scale. A Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) report recognised this, when the department was asked to provide details on 'British Strategic Political Warfare'. The Cabinet Office had made the request following a memorandum by the Conservative MP Geoffrey Stewart-Smith calling for greater activity in the field.⁷³³ The FCO report noted the MP's concerns but "that [o]ur effort is likely to decline rather than increase as we run down our information services".⁷³⁴ Given the drive to reduce costs it is perhaps not surprising the Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP) was "abolished" on 11 July 1968. The disbandment was an easy win, as senior posts within the DFP had been merged, likely leaving the organisation without strong advocates for its continuation. The original role, as the successor of the wartime London Controlling Section, had been to plan deception operations. The specific circumstances of wartime censorship and developments in technology had reduced the opportunities for deception operations and, as in South Arabia, the DFP had focused on delivering counter-subversion through psychological operations and community relations. Although financial considerations were likely a reason for the demise of the DFP, another factor was almost certainly the retirement of the organisation's Deputy Director, Colonel Noel Wild, who had served almost continuously in this role since the end of the war.⁷³⁵ The DFP was not the only organisation where the retirement of personnel potentially acted as a catalyst for reorganisation. Around the same time as the DFP was disbanded SIS' Special Political Action (SPA) section was also closed.⁷³⁶ It was likely this decision took account of the expense of SPA, the need for such activity as détente increased but also the potential for controversy if discovered. The closure of the section reduced overall costs and moved responsibility for SPA to SIS' regional controllers, as the wish for "clandestine subversive operations in support of overseas objectives" diminished.⁷³⁷

As a result of the disbandment of the DFP, a much-reduced Psychological Operations Section was established in the MOD's Operations Centre under the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Operations). This section would continue to liaise with the IRD, both at desk level and through the training courses, that a two-person training team at the Joint

⁷³³ TNA, FCO 28/926 Memorandum by Geoffrey Stewart-Smith MP British Strategic Political Warfare, November 1970.

⁷³⁴ TNA, FCO 28/926 British Strategic Political Warfare and Counter Subversion, 2 December 1970.

⁷³⁵ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Appendix 1 History of United Kingdom Deception Organisation p A1-3, 31 July 1969.

⁷³⁶ Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny* p 195.

⁷³⁷ Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying* p 288 and Cormac, Goodman & Holman, "A Modern-Day Requirement for Co-Ordinated Covert Action" p 17.

Warfare Establishment (JWE) organised and ran. Although reduced in size, the Government's wish to use the methods of political warfare was still apparent during Operation Sheepskin, which resulted from a long political dispute over the continuing poverty of islanders on the British dependency of Anguilla in the Caribbean. In an attempt to restore order a military task force was dispatched in March 1969. When the troops landed on the island they were greeted by local people and journalists, causing a degree of embarrassment for the Government at the time, who were accused of overreacting with the deployment.⁷³⁸ The example is useful in illustrating the results of cuts to political warfare, persistent problems in supporting its activities and further reorganisation by the MOD.

When Operation Sheepskin was launched at short notice, the only available psychological operations support was through one of the two officers from the training team at the JWE.⁷³⁹ Previously the DFP had been responsible for the dispatch of planners for political warfare activities and through them the control of Army Information Teams. The limited support that one psychological operations planner was able to provide was recorded as particularly challenging the rapid reinstatement of civil administration in Anguilla. A carefully "prepared propaganda effort" was required if future operations were to be more effective.⁷⁴⁰ Intelligence support specific to the requirements of political warfare was criticised, as the lack of accurate local information prevented adverse propaganda from being effectively countered.⁷⁴¹ Specific reference was made to the success of a "children's party on board [HMS] MINERVA" which the report identified as a hearts and minds activity.⁷⁴² Given that it was designed to foster goodwill amongst the local population, it could have been labelled community relations as had been the case in South Arabia. Indeed, the actual findings from Operation Sheepskin with regard to the problems of political warfare were very similar to those encountered in South Arabia. That such problems still occurred suggests although disbanding the DFP may have saved money, there had been limited investment in developing political warfare as a capability. Given the continued wish to use political warfare, as seen by the request for a psychological operations planner to deploy on Operation Sheepskin, this seems short sighted.

⁷³⁸ Spencer Mawby, "Overwhelmed in a Very Small Place: The Wilson Government and the Crisis Over Anguilla", *Twentieth Century British History* 23:3 (2012) p 266.

⁷³⁹ TNA, DEFE 11/884 Psychological Operations Support to in Anguilla 1969 (JTF 61), 6 June 1969.

⁷⁴⁰ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 54 Report on "Operation Sheepskin" in Anguilla March/April 1969 p A-4.

⁷⁴¹ TNA, DEFE 11/884 Psychological Operations Support to in Anguilla 1969 (JTF 61), 6 June 1969.

⁷⁴² TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 54 Report on "Operation Sheepskin" in Anguilla March/April 1969 p A1-1

As a result of the reports from Operation Sheepskin, the MOD instigated a review into the coordination of cross-Government propaganda, psychological and other special operations. The MOD report was widely circulated for comment by a range of personnel across Government. Whilst the final report emphasized that political direction was essential for activities such as military psychological operations to be effective, there is little evidence that the problems identified led to comprehensive changes.⁷⁴³ Following the demise of the DFP, the Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Operations) was now the military member of the Counter Subversion Committee (CSC). As such they were responsible for the coordination of both psychological operations, continuing community relations projects in overseas bases and tactical and strategic deception. This effectively meant that the activities of the DFP had been passed to another, smaller, organisation. The Joint Action Committee (JAC) was still the coordinating body for the integration and synchronisation of clandestine activities.⁷⁴⁴ Again, this appears to demonstrate that actually limited changes were made to systems established during the campaign in South Arabia. The increased emphasis by the MOD for routine cross-departmental activities was encouraged through requests for IRD personnel to lecture and attend psychological operations courses at the JWE.⁷⁴⁵ Potentially more useful was the establishment of two Army Information Teams (AIT's). The first, No 1 AIT was located in Hong Kong. Probably as a result of cost saving again, the second, No. 2 AIT was a cadre unit. This meant that it would only have personnel assigned to it in the event of contingency operations. In this guise it would later be deployed to Oman. Although strategic issues appear to have been recognised because of Operation Sheepskin, problems that should have been identified from failure in South Arabia still occurred and were not effectively rectified.⁷⁴⁶ There continued to be a lack of investment in the overall capability of political warfare, despite it being viewed across Government as a useful element to support British overseas operations. The reduced capability would shortly be tested as the insurgency in Oman escalated.

⁷⁴³ TNA, DEFE 25/289 A Review of Military Psychological Operations Policy, 26 September 1969.

⁷⁴⁴ TNA, DEFE 5/182 folio 48 Strategic and Tactical Deception p A-10, 31 July 1969.

⁷⁴⁵ TNA, FCO 95/464 Forsyth to Johnston, 10 November 1969.

⁷⁴⁶ TNA, DEFE 25/289 Review of Military Psyops Policy, 10 October 1969 and Military Psychological Operations, 27 October 1969.

A Developing Crisis in Oman, 1968-1970

The abandonment of South Arabia had fundamentally changed the situation for a small but growing insurgency in Oman.⁷⁴⁷ The likely impact of such a retreat had been recognised by the FO in 1966 with officials noting that the withdrawal was “bound to lead to increased attacks on our position in the Gulf and local regimes”.⁷⁴⁸ Before the withdrawal the remaining participants in the Jebel Akhdar revolt were scattered, either isolated within the province of Dhofar or part of a dispersed community spread across the Gulf. There was external support for these groups from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt and from Arab nationalist scholars working primarily from Kuwait.⁷⁴⁹ Whilst this external backing was important there was also genuine popular support amongst the Dhofar population for an insurgency against “the neglectful government of Sultan Said”.⁷⁵⁰ When the external supporters organised themselves into the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) and infiltrated back into Oman, their campaign was militarily unsuccessful, but they were supported by the majority of the local population. The terrain greatly assisted the DLF fighters as it was ideally suited to guerrilla warfare. In the west of Oman in the province of Dhofar the *jebel* or mountain rises almost straight out of the sea and stretches for approximately 100 kilometres inland. To the east the mountainous ridgeline narrows forming a fertile coastal plain. The foothills of this area have a unique feature, that of regular rainfall. This meant that after the monsoon period (May to September) the area was covered with lush vegetation which, even in the dry season, provided cover for the movement or hiding of small groups. There were few reliable water sources and no proper roads meaning that without constant logistical support, operating in this area was difficult for both the insurgents and SAF. The support of the local population to either side would therefore be advantageous. Winning them over to the Omani Government side would therefore be an important task for political warfare.

The rugged terrain allowed the DLF insurgents to hide from the under resourced SAF who were unable to find and fix the DLF in order to defeat them. With the willing support of elements of the local population, dissatisfied with the continued repressive rule of Sultan

⁷⁴⁷ Kelly, “Vanishing Act” p 181.

⁷⁴⁸ TNA, FO 953/2502 Counter-Subversion in the Persian Gulf, 27 June 1966.

⁷⁴⁹ Talal Al-Rashoud, “From Muscat to the Maghreb: Pan Arab Networks, Anti Colonial Groups and Kuwait’s Arab Scholarship (1953-1961)”, *Arabian Humanities* [online], 12:19 (March 2020) p 16.

⁷⁵⁰ DeVore, “A More Complex and Conventional Victory” p 146.

Said, a low-level insurgency was begun.⁷⁵¹ The installation of the Marxist PDRY in neighbouring Aden in 1967 provided a safe haven for the rebels. In a December 1967 paper the Foreign Office noted that “in Muscat, Dhofar and the Gulf” the PDRY were already considering a coordinated campaign “against imperialism and its exploitation of Arab oil”.⁷⁵² As well as support from the PDRY, first China and then the Soviet Union provided sponsorship to the insurgents. The People’s Republic of China built a training camp in the PDRY in 1967 and (not wishing to see the only Marxist state in the Middle East side with China) the Soviet Union also provided assistance.⁷⁵³ The insurgent movement took on a Communist identity, changing its aim from reform inside Oman to regional revolution, with the group’s name changed to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG).⁷⁵⁴

The Oman Counter-Revolution

The security situation in Oman continued to worsen between 1969 and 1970, with only a small part of the coastal plain of Dhofar being held by the SAF and the remainder of the province controlled by PFLOAG. The SAF resources were significantly less than the physical and indeed cognitive support PFLOAG were now receiving. Aden Radio broadcast supportive messages about PFLOAG whilst no comparable Omani Government service was able to reach Dhofar. On the *jebel* the local population were influenced by the perception of PFLOAG victories against the apparent failures of the Omani state.⁷⁵⁵ At this time the SAF were still issued with bolt action rifles, air support was limited (but improving) and medical treatment for those injured in battle was rudimentary.⁷⁵⁶ PFLOAG on the other hand could now field a mixed force of 5000 regular and militia troops, equipped with modern assault rifles, indirect fire systems and could evacuate its injured across the border for medical treatment in South Yemen.⁷⁵⁷ It is surprising to read a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) report from 1969 stating that “our assistance in developing

⁷⁵¹ Maurice Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* (Thesis for Doctor Philosophy: King’s College, University of London, 1979) p 273.

⁷⁵² TNA, FCO 168/2542 N.L.F, 15 December 1967.

⁷⁵³ Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War Two to Gorbachev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p 12-16.

⁷⁵⁴ The insurgent force in Dhofar changed its name four times between 1963 and 1974 but for consistency the author will use the version which was chosen at the start of the most active phase of its struggle in 1968. Second Congress of the Dhofar Liberation Front, *Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf* (London: Gulf Committee London, 1974) p 9-11.

⁷⁵⁵ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 274.

⁷⁵⁶ Hughes, “Demythologising Dhofar” p 436.

⁷⁵⁷ Peter Thwaites and Simon Sloan, *Muscat Command* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1995) p 70.

the Sultan's Armed Forces has proved well-judged and effective and there is no immediately foreseeable security problem in Oman itself with which they could not deal".⁷⁵⁸ In fact insurgent activity was building and there followed successful attacks by PFLOAG during the early part of 1970 and further attacks by Iraqi trained insurgents into Northern Oman in June that year. These attacks surprised the British and Omani Governments, who had no forewarning of them. The attacks in the north were the catalyst for action as they demonstrated that Britain's national interests were now at stake as the main artery of its oil supply was threatened.⁷⁵⁹ Not only were these interests to do with access through the Straits of Hormuz but a domino theory developed. This suggesting that Communist subversion could infect not only Oman but also the Gulf states, precisely at the time when Britain was withdrawing its military forces.⁷⁶⁰ In this context, the increase in British support to the Sultanate was part of a wider anti-Communist campaign, a proxy war of the Cold War, which would make British assistance less ideologically divisive as it had been in the campaign fought in South Arabia.⁷⁶¹

Comparison of the policies of both Labour and Conservative Party's (the Conservative's would be elected in June 1970) towards Oman show some similarity. Both were concerned about preserving British influence and preventing a domino effect across the Gulf region should PFLOAG successfully topple the Sultan. Additionally, both wanted to implement a strategy that included more of a physical commitment to Oman.⁷⁶² The proviso was that such a strategy needed to prevent Britain being drawn into a campaign similar to the one in South Arabia or being waged in Vietnam.⁷⁶³ Both FCO and MOD documents from early 1970 to 1973 make repeated reference to a "micro-Vietnam in the Arabian Peninsula", suggesting that the Government feared being drawn into a conflict like that being fought by the US. The key differences between the two political parties were the level of "commitment and determination" to succeed in Oman.⁷⁶⁴

In South Arabia, British Government decision-making towards the establishment and support for a Federation had been incremental in part because of the machinery of

⁷⁵⁸ TNA, CAB 148/97 FCO memo for Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 3 October 1969.

⁷⁵⁹ Newsinger, *British Counter-Insurgency* p 142.

⁷⁶⁰ DeVore, "The United Kingdom's Last Hot War of the Cold War" p 6.

⁷⁶¹ Gardiner, *In the Service of the Sultan* p 8. WC Ladwig III, "Supporting allies in counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 19:1 (2008) p 63-64.

⁷⁶² TNA, CAB 148/97 The Plan for British Military Withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf, 2 October 1969.

⁷⁶³ TNA, FCO 46/609 Ministry of Defence, 1970 and FCO 8/2006 Memo by A Parsons Middle Eastern Department, 22 February 1973.

⁷⁶⁴ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 72.

government. The committee bureaucracy in particular allowed for the putting off of firm choices because such a structure encouraged a pragmatic but short-term approach particularly with regard to foreign policy.⁷⁶⁵ When a crisis struck such a process could mean that options had narrowed, making choices all the more difficult or unpalatable. Whilst there is presently no archival evidence of the use of highly compartmentalised bodies such as the JAC as had been the case in South Arabia, British decision making appears to have been at a level that prevented the bitter inter-departmental disputes evident during the previous campaign.⁷⁶⁶ The decision to pursue British support through hidden means meant that the campaign did not attract such wide spread attention as had been the case in South Arabia. The decision to support the removal of Sultan Said is an example of this. Although there remains discussion in the historical literature about who ultimately sponsored it, the seamless way in which the events of the coup played out, especially in the wake of a general election in the UK, demonstrate clear sighted objectives in planning and execution as opposed to the previous wait and see approach that had characterised South Arabia.

The events of the coup in July 1970 have come to define the campaign in Oman; often the hidden or underhand ways have been used by some authors to explain the entire conflict.⁷⁶⁷ The coup itself is well described as covert and contemporary doctrine provides a useful definition of this type of operation as “planned and executed so as to conceal the identity of, or permit plausible denial by, the sponsor”.⁷⁶⁸ In an April 1970 memorandum sent between the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, and the Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey the decision to give Sultan Said one last chance to change his plans and effectively counter the PFLOAG insurgency.⁷⁶⁹ The British Government were already discussing the possibility that a coup could occur in Oman and these are recorded in MOD and JIC documents from February 1970.⁷⁷⁰ The likelihood of a coup was then formally recorded by the Government in July 1970.⁷⁷¹ Although the Sultan agreed to some reforms during the early part of 1970, his refusal to accept others led to the British

⁷⁶⁵ David Vital, *The Making of British Foreign Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968) p 262-264.

⁷⁶⁶ Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 168.

⁷⁶⁷ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 311-312.

⁷⁶⁸ TNA, WO 279/649 Land Operations Volume III – Counter Revolutionary Operations Part 1 – Principles and General Aspects, 29 August 1969 p 5.

⁷⁶⁹ TNA, DEFE 24/1855, Stewart to Healey, 15 April 1970.

⁷⁷⁰ TNA, DEFE 24/1867 HMG Policy: The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, 25 February 1970. This is described in detail by Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 158-159. Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 186.

⁷⁷¹ TNA, DEFE 24/1856 The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman: Possibility of a Coup, 8 July 1970.

Government predicting that his regime would not survive past 1971.⁷⁷² A 2009 BBC Radio 4 documentary brought to wider public attention that The National Archives had inadvertently allowed British Government files relating to specific preparations for a coup against Sultan Said to become publicly accessible for a short period of time.⁷⁷³ The mistakenly published documents revealed that the Government had prior knowledge of plans put together by the Sultan's Defence Secretary, Colonel Hugh Oldman. Oldman used Tim Landon, a British Army Officer and Sandhurst contemporary of the Sultan's son (Qaboos) to approach him and suggest a coup.⁷⁷⁴ The historian Abdel Takriti suggests that Oldman wished for and received "HMG's full backing and support" and constructed two plans; A and B.⁷⁷⁵ Plan A was on the assumption of a successful coup by Qaboos, Plan B was that Qaboos failed and that the SAF would have to become directly involved.⁷⁷⁶

The planned coup was discussed in Whitehall and courses of action agreed, including giving Qaboos refuge if it failed.⁷⁷⁷ This was not required as the coup was successfully executed on 23 July 1970. The coup was one of a number carried out in the region during the period.⁷⁷⁸ The removal of Said provided the British with a new ruler through which they aimed to stabilise the situation. The imperative to removing Sultan Said, that Oman could fall to Marxists insurgents, had been a threat to Britain's national interests. The indirect way these interests were protected through the sponsorship of the coup and the persistence in not officially confirming the Government's role, fit with the overall change to the way Britain now acted in the Gulf. Britain's support for Sultan Qaboos' (as he became) coup continues to cause debate: on the one hand as an example of successful covert action; but on the other, potentially morally underhand. The subsequent rule of Sultan Qaboos has come under criticism, as it effectively was a continuation of imperialism and

⁷⁷² DeVore "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 150.

⁷⁷³ These documents were photographed whilst open to the public by the historian Marc DeVore. Mike Thomson, "Document" *BBC Radio 4*, 23 November 2009. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00ny7nb> accessed on 27 January 2022. TNA FCO 46/609 is partially open but with sections retained under the Public Records Act.

⁷⁷⁴ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 150 and Thomson, "Document".

⁷⁷⁵ TNA, DEFE, 24/1856 Crawford to Acland, 8 July 1970 as quoted in Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 175.

⁷⁷⁶ Thomson, "Document".

⁷⁷⁷ Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny* p 190.

⁷⁷⁸ In 1965 Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah was removed from his small emirate in the Persian Gulf and the following year, Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi was also deposed. Helene Von Bismarck, *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961-1968: Conceptions of Informal Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013) p 148-153 and (same author) "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* 47:1 (2011) p 15-18.

the character of rule was absolutist.⁷⁷⁹ This is important for the study of political warfare in Oman because a primary aim of psychological operations from the start of the campaign was to persuade the local population of the integrity and legitimacy of the new Sultan.⁷⁸⁰ Current historical debate continues to re-examine Britain's imperial past and with no official confirmation of its exact role in the Oman coup appears to demonstrate the continued irritant that its past actions in the Middle East can cause. Modern viewpoints are almost certain to continue debating Britain's role and intervention in Oman. At the time however, it appears that the threat of another Marxist regime in Southern Arabia was viewed by British officials as hardly better than the status quo and in the long run far worse for their interests and those of the majority of the Omani population.⁷⁸¹ A comprehensive effort would now be made to assist in the building of a new Omani state with political warfare forming a significant component.

The Campaign Framework

The successful coup did not immediately alter the situation in Dhofar. Sultan Qaboos' British advisors, Colonel Oldman and the commander of the SAF, Major General John Graham had previously proposed a plan that would cut the rebels off from their supply lines into the PDRY.⁷⁸² This plan was modified after a visit by the Director of the Special Air Service (SAS), Brigadier Ferguson Semple.⁷⁸³ Semple's report was published in August 1970 and devised a new concept of operations that laid out what has traditionally been seen as the successful framework for the campaign. The plan envisaged the SAF driving PFLOAG forces away from population centres, the separation of the insurgents and the local population. This would allow the Omani Government to re-establish control through a consolidated military, political and economic counter-revolution, Sultan Qaboos' Government would defeat PFLOAG with limited (visible) British support. The immediate military support from Britain was a small SAS team to train bodyguards for the Sultan and a squadron of approximately forty SAS personnel to support the Muscat and Northern Frontier Regiments. These SAF elements would then be used in offensive operations

⁷⁷⁹ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 312 and Christopher Davidson, *Shadow Wars* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2016) p 28-31.

⁷⁸⁰ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁷⁸¹ Sarah G Philips and Jennifer S Hunt, "Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen': The Renaissance Narrative and the Political Settlement in Oman" *Journal of International Development* 29 (2017) p 646.

⁷⁸² DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 151.

⁷⁸³ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 84.

against PFLOAG in early 1971.⁷⁸⁴ The gaining of intelligence was seen as vital. The requirement for linguists, analysts and interrogators was included in the concept of operations, as was “a psyops trained NCO”.⁷⁸⁵ The latter was Corporal (later Sergeant) John Ward (22 SAS) whose personal reflections of the information campaign provide new insights on the political warfare campaign in Oman.

John Ward originally joined 21 SAS (one of the reserve special forces units) before transferring to the regular British Army.⁷⁸⁶ He had trained at St Martin’s Art School and been employed as a commercial artist working for an advertising agency before joining the Army. Prior to his selection and deployment to Oman in October 1970, Ward had been working in the HQ of 22 SAS in Hereford but was quickly sent on the two-week psychological operations course through the JWE in Old Sarum. He also attended a two-day meeting with IRD and was given further specialist training by them.⁷⁸⁷ This is of interest as it shows the collaboration that continued to occur between the IRD and MOD in the conduct of political warfare.⁷⁸⁸ He joined the British Army Training Team (BATT) – the cover name for the SAS and attached arms deployment to Oman and would spend the next ten years involved in the country, the first four as a soldier and then as a civilian advisor. Through these different roles, John Ward had a perspective on the political warfare campaign that crossed the line between the tactical and strategic levels giving a different insight into events. His junior rank in the British Army could have proved an issue but Ward’s membership of the SAS probably gave the gravitas for his role to be taken seriously. The SAS Operations Officer, Major Nightingale had recently written to the MOD on the Regiment’s use of psychological operations in both operations and training: “I am anxious to develop this form of warfare [psychological operations] within the Regiment”.⁷⁸⁹ In the letter Nightingale also stated that the Regimental Education Officer would be responsible for such activities. That Ward was deployed in his place was possibly due to him being immediately available but could also have been due to his civilian experience as a commercial artist.⁷⁹⁰ An alternative is that psychological operations were seen as less

⁷⁸⁴ TNA, DEFE 25/186 Assistance to SAF, 13 August 1970.

⁷⁸⁵ TNA, DEFE 25/186 Folio 21 Visit of the Military Secretary to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, 12 October 1970.

⁷⁸⁶ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ TNA, FCO 168/777 IRD Terms of Reference, dated 1963.

⁷⁸⁹ TNA, DEFE 25/289 Nightingale to Hinton, 10 March 1970.

⁷⁹⁰ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

important than other activities of the SAS. This more negative view is supported by remarks by a senior Warrant Officer who served with Ward.⁷⁹¹ Whatever the reason, Ward's new role was recognised as important by the British Consulate General who wrote in November 1970 that, "the fiercest battles that will be fought in Dhofar will be for the minds of the Jebalis".⁷⁹² This quote, taken from IRD files released in 2019, is important because it shows a heightened level of interest in shaping the perceptions of the local population. Not only does this challenge the level of importance of psychological operations in Oman but the retention of files such as these provides evidence that the British Government wanted to downplay this type of activity. This is likely because the manipulation of the local population could be seen as underhand and call into question the legitimacy of such methods. Alternatively the Government may have wished to continue using such methods and their efficacy could be diminished if widely known. As will be seen however, John Ward and others would work hard to achieve more than a measure of success using such ways and means in Oman, which adds to the historical narrative of the campaign.

Initially information on what was occurring outside of Government-controlled areas in Oman was sparse and John Ward's early efforts were to simply publicise positive actions of the Sultan. This he did by placing notice boards in Government-controlled areas to advertise activities, however limited these were at first.⁷⁹³ Ward described one early success as the advertisement of a vaccination programme for both the local population and their livestock which allowed the BATT, through the attached British Army doctor and vet, to meet the local population.⁷⁹⁴ Such interactions allowed BATT members to start building a rapport with local people and from this to begin to better understand the state of the insurgency. Prior to the deployment of the BATT, a small number of British officers had been seconded or contracted as Desert or Sultan's Intelligence Officers, but the material they provided had not been properly analysed making it of limited intelligence value.⁷⁹⁵ The first priority of the BATT intelligence cell was therefore to develop baseline products through which the terrain and insurgents' activity could be interpreted and

⁷⁹¹ Ken Connor, *Ghost Force: The Secret History of the SAS* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998) p 158 and 171.

⁷⁹² TNA, FCO 168/4129 Radio Station Salalah letter from Crawford to Joy, 25 November 1970.

⁷⁹³ Clive Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar: An Appraisal", *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 25:3 (2014) p 634.

⁷⁹⁴ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁷⁹⁵ Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar" p 632.

integrated into planning.⁷⁹⁶ The reports that had been produced by the Desert or Sultan's Intelligence Officers were now dusted off and combined with any other sources of data and information available and analysed to produce all-source intelligence products. Through the analysis carried out by the BATT intelligence cell an understanding began to be gained of what would today be termed, the human terrain of Dhofar.⁷⁹⁷ Through this process the interplay of social, political, geographic and other factors was considered and deductions drawn on the impact of them on the insurgency.⁷⁹⁸ Unlike in previous operations, Ward recalled that he was co-located with the intelligence cell and able to make use of these new assessments.⁷⁹⁹ This co-location facilitated the exchange of ideas and Ward produced a set of psychological operations aims which were to; support military operations assisting in the military defeat of the insurgents; persuade the local population of the legitimacy of Sultan Qaboos' Government; and therein support the defeat of the insurgents.⁸⁰⁰ Plans could be devised that made use of this enhanced understanding of the environment and situation to frame the propaganda messaging of the campaign.

The shift to a Marxist 'internationalist' outlook by PFLOAG fundamentally changed the course of the conflict in Oman as it altered the relationship between the insurgents and the population of Dhofar.⁸⁰¹ This would have profound effects for the information campaign at both the tactical and strategic level. As an example of this PFLOAG attempted to establish a social programme in Dhofar that would challenge the role of religion and the importance of tribal structures. This was almost certainly viewed as progressive by cadres educated abroad, but to the local population the new ideology appeared as an imposition.⁸⁰² This misunderstanding of the importance of religion and familial-clan ties provided an early opportunity for psychological operations to counter PFLOAG. Tony Jeapes observed soon after arriving in late 1970 that, "even in the minds of the hardest hardcore Communist there must remain the seeds of Islam from his childhood".⁸⁰³ Using religion to influence the local populations helped to draw support away from the rebels and would become a key narrative theme of the campaign. Sultan Qaboos' early reforms helped as they removed

⁷⁹⁶ Clive Jones, "A Guiding Hand or Controlling Grasp?": British Intelligence, and the War in Oman, 1970-1976 in Jeffery Macris and Saul Kelly (Eds), *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012) p 96.

⁷⁹⁷ Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar" p 629.

⁷⁹⁸ UK MOD, *Army Field Manual Countering Insurgency Volume 1 – Part 10* p 3-4.

⁷⁹⁹ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 148.

⁸⁰² Mattiesen, "Red Arabia" p 99-100.

⁸⁰³ Jeapes, *SAS Secret War* p 39.

some of the restrictive practices of his father and could be shown as demonstrating that change under the existing regime was possible. Similarly, the Sultan's view that Dhofaris were "fellow-countrymen who had been misled, rather than enemies" proved crucial for the propaganda campaign.⁸⁰⁴ This allowed for the possibility of those who had previously sided with PFLOAG to be reconciled with the Government. In order to communicate with both the insurgents and the local population leaflets were produced as a way to "lay down a propaganda barrage" at a time when SAF elements were being re-trained by the BATT and other Government activity against PFLOAG was limited.⁸⁰⁵

The messages that the psychological warfare leaflets promulgated were to constantly remind local people that traditional religion was the proper route to follow and that the new Sultan was the only way to do this. Through these targeted leaflet drops the Dhofari population were to be persuaded that the insurgents were godless, that they would have a better life under the Sultan and therein drive a wedge between the different segments of the insurgency. Similar appeals would be made through the first Government radio station established in Salalah in August 1970 and later by film and television when these media became available later in the campaign. In the early period (1970-71), leaflets were the most effective means of projecting Government messages into insurgent held areas. Knowing that literacy levels were low among the local people, messages were simple and often accompanied with a picture. Printing methods were basic and used commercially available Letraset sheets of transferable letters and illustrations.

Ward remembered that using the illustration of a leafy bush and one without leaves, produced a leaflet with the caption, 'Islam is prosperous with the Sultan, life is barren with the Communists'.⁸⁰⁶ The leaflets were either dropped over the *jebel* by aircraft or later fired by artillery using special shells. Ward described how the leaflets were found to be most effective when dropped at night and picked up in the morning.⁸⁰⁷ By dropping the leaflets at night they could not immediately be picked up and offered an opportunity for disaffected insurgents to surreptitiously obtain one without being put at risk by being seen to handle them. The leaflets also acted as safe conduct passes to enable individuals to surrender to the SAF. Ward's recollections therefore offer a useful insight here because

⁸⁰⁴ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 275.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁶ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

the leaflets were deliberately distributed in a manner that allowed them to be gathered without harm coming to the individual. At this time PFLOAG propaganda reported that a “reactionary conspiracy” had been put down by force but it is possible that this was an attempt to prevent elements of the insurgency from surrendering to the Government or returning to their homes.⁸⁰⁸ The historian Abdel Takriti appears to disagree that the use of the Islamic faith through psychological operations had a significant impact. His interpretation is that the religiously focused propaganda, like the ‘Hand of God Destroys Communism’ leaflet (which Ward drew) was deploying political fear “as a mobilization tool in the service of the throne”.⁸⁰⁹ His argument is that the use of religion was another way of demonstrating the centrality of Sultan Qaboos and the authoritarian character of his rule as it was the only form of government that came from God.⁸¹⁰ Although impossible to prove definitively, the harnessing of religion and the Sultan’s amnesty for insurgents appears to have had an effect on the number of surrendered enemy personnel (SEP) with the numbers increasing.⁸¹¹ Although initially making small gains, more than a thousand SEP would accept the Sultan’s amnesty offer which had been amplified by psychological operations.

Stalemate, 1971-1973

An assessment of the effectiveness of the psychological operations in Dhofar appears to have first been made in March 1971. The impact that John Ward was having can now be assessed through newly release IRD files. These record that Ward was singlehandedly a “PRO [public relations officer], IRD officer, editorial writer and diplomat” and his efforts were rewarded with increasing numbers of both neutral and dissident Dhofaris returning to Government-controlled areas.⁸¹² The actual psychological operations themselves were still highly tactical with the messages displayed on notice boards in local villages being supported through radio broadcasts. Small transistor radios had previously been distributed to the local population for free but were only able to receive Omani Government stations. John Ward considered this a mistake as PFLOAG could simply confiscate the radios as Government propaganda devices and might view the owner as being pro-Government. Instead, he bought and then sold ordinary radios to local people. The sale

⁸⁰⁸ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 276

⁸⁰⁹ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 258.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid* p 259-262.

⁸¹¹ DeVore, “A More Complex and Conventional Victory” p 148.

⁸¹² TNA, FCO 168/4129, Counter-Propaganda: Dhofar, 29 January 1971.

of the radios was based on the idea that the purchaser would be less likely to relinquish an item that they had paid for.⁸¹³

Although literacy was low, a local system of 'letter writers' already existed and once this was discovered, the BATT arranged for a monthly payment to these individuals so they would also read out the announcements on the notice boards. Flat pack letter boxes were now produced by the Royal Engineers at Salalah and placed next to the notice boards in villages. Sultanate stamps were sold in villages which helped to introduce more modern systems of communications than had previously existed. The postal system was successfully publicised as a way for ordinary people to communicate directly with their Government. This amplified the general idea that the Sultan wished to offer the people a different future than had existed under his father and wished to understand people's problems.⁸¹⁴ Ward had begun to attend the Wali of Dhofar's daily *majelis* (also spelt as *majlis*), a gathering to discuss administrative arrangements in the province. This offered the opportunity to understand local decision making and how communicating it more effectively to the local population could improve the image of the Government overall.⁸¹⁵ Sultan Qaboos was quick to comprehend the value of broadcasting to increase the reach of his messages and had made his first radio broadcast in October 1970.⁸¹⁶ BATT psychological operations could mould these messages into a consistent narrative which emphasised reconciliation and was passed across different media, having a measurable effect in the number of SEP.

The Reality of Hearts and Minds

The apparent early successes of the psychological operations campaign should not be over emphasised nor seen as focused on successful delivery of a 'hearts and minds' approach. The Oman campaign has been somewhat mythologised in some quarters to either focus on the role of the SAS or to exalt it as a model of successful counter-insurgency.⁸¹⁷ This interpretation was included in the counter-insurgency doctrine issued to British forces during operations in Afghanistan.⁸¹⁸ A view of the Oman campaign has

⁸¹³ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁸¹⁴ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post Imperial Era* p 77

⁸¹⁷ French, *Army, Empire and Cold War* p 1.

⁸¹⁸ UK MOD, *Army Field Manual Countering Insurgency Volume 1 – Part 10* p CS3-1 – CS3-4.

been generated that sees the propaganda and psychological operations as leading to increased SEP, who were subsequently recruited into the irregular *firqats* and it was these irregulars and the SAS who successfully won the campaign.⁸¹⁹ This has been questioned by recent accounts, which point out that although SEP's provided the manpower for the *firqats* (and the opportunity for returned insurgents to speak face to face in villages around Salalah) the irregular groups were not the success that has previously been reported.⁸²⁰ The plan originally devised was for phased military operations using the SAF to defeat PFLOAG by first cutting their supply lines. It would then launch a series of offensive operations to destroy PFLOAG groups across Dhofar, sweeping towards the border with the PDRY.⁸²¹ The *firqats* would be used to pacify the areas that the SAF cleared. In fact, the pacification efforts were more limited than was originally intended and primacy was given to offensive operations, which is not the same as the 'hearts and minds' led approach that is often repeated in the historical literature.

The actual activities of this phase of the campaign appear removed from a so called 'hearts and minds' approach. Instead, they support historical research from other campaigns that argues that British counter-insurgency practice included a high degree of coercion as opposed to the more positive or even progressive character that has sometimes been argued.⁸²² A British Government report from 1971 emphasised the importance of the psychological operations being to drop leaflets by aircraft to help persuade both "dissident and neutral tribesmen" to come over the Government's side.⁸²³ The use of postal interception in South Arabia has been revealed by IRD files but Ward recalled that a similar approach was practiced in Oman.⁸²⁴ Having established a village post system, the new communication methods also provided the Government with the opportunity to intercept and read mail addressed to Aden or other likely PFLOAG locations such as Beirut.⁸²⁵ This is important evidence of the reality of political warfare. Whilst the postal system could be presented as a way to improve communications, the interception of mail was a breach of trust. Ward's revelations are therefore important as they show how

⁸¹⁹ Akehurst, *We Won a War* p 63-64.

⁸²⁰ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 154.

⁸²¹ TNA, DEFE 24/575 Memorandum by Commander British Forces Persian Gulf, 16 November 1971.

⁸²² French, "Nasty Not nice": British Counter-Insurgency Doctrine and Practice, 1945–1967", *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 23:4-5 (2012) p 758 and Hack, "Everyone Lived in Fear" p 673.

⁸²³ TNA, DEFE 25/186 PsyOps in Oman and Dhofar – Up dating SitRep, 19 March 1971.

⁸²⁴ See chapter three of this thesis or for specific examples, See TNA, FCO 168/1115 Ashworth to Welser, 2 January 1965 and FCO 168/1536 Ashworth to Welser, 9 March 1965.

⁸²⁵ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

projects to improve the local populations lives could be manipulated. This is an example of the more coercive character of the campaign than has previously been suggested, with the postal system being exploited for intelligence gathering purposes by the Omani Government. In a further example reminiscent of the Malaya campaign, food was restricted as a way of driving the insurgents from the *jebel* through hunger. This particular measure was different from the traditional (and positive) view of Britain's approach to 'hearts and minds' that argues "the government ensures that basic amenities and primary needs are met, and that conditions are progressively enhanced".⁸²⁶ Military operations had established a SAF presence on the *jebel* which allowed the interception of local people as they moved between their villages and the only shop in Salalah. Under an order from the Government, the shop was closed for a month, forcing people to stockpile food but within strict limits imposed by the state. This and other measures prevented the local population from supplying PFLOAG insurgents, lest they and their family go hungry.⁸²⁷ This method worked in a similar fashion to the earlier framing of the conflict in religious versus Marxist terms in that it served to both, physically and cognitively, separate the insurgents from the population. For some insurgents the refusal to provide them with food condemned the local people to a charge of treason. Interviews with former PFLOAG members have shown that insurgents saw the denial of support in terms of the local population refusing a "wartime measure" and that reprisals were justified as they instilled unity in the community.⁸²⁸ The Government's methods did not attempt to "disguise the efficacy of harsh measures" but the violent reprisals handed out by PFLOAG demonstrated a key difference between the two sides towards local people.⁸²⁹

The gains made by the SAF military operations in late 1971 and early 1972 made progress in establishing a Government presence on the *jebel* but there was a sense of disappointment in Whitehall, with one FCO official referring to the conflict as "a kind of micro-Vietnam".⁸³⁰ The need for the SAF to halt operations during the monsoon provided PFLOAG supporters with an avenue to claim a victory over the Omani Government as they withdrew from the *Jebel*. Whilst local messages could be delivered successfully via different media the lack of overall SAF success and a continued wish to restrict knowledge

⁸²⁶ Michael Crawshaw, "The Evolution of British COIN", guidance for UK MOD, Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, *Security and Stabilisation* (Shrivenham: UK MOD, 2012) p 7, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-evolution-of-british-coin>, accessed on 23 August 2022.

⁸²⁷ Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar" p 636.

⁸²⁸ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 275.

⁸²⁹ Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar" p 629.

⁸³⁰ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 156.

of British assistance limited support within Oman itself.⁸³¹ British officials thought that if British assistance become widely known it could provide a “gift” for PFLOAG and their supporters.⁸³² A MOD report from March 1971 noted that the SAF were unlikely to gain a wholesale military victory that year and it was useful to extend the information campaign as a way of increasing support for Oman without committing further military forces.⁸³³ The IRD files reveal that some cooperation was already occurring with the Regional Information Officer, Peter Joy, visiting Dhofar in January 1971.⁸³⁴ Joy and his successor supported the BATT with a stream of IRD material (unattributable anti-communist material). This was similar to the cooperation that had occurred between the IRD and DFP in South Arabia.

A specially trained No. 2 Army Information Team had been created by the MOD and would deploy on six-month tours to Oman beginning in the Autumn of 1971. The seven-man teams were to increase and enhance the psychological operations begun by John Ward who was replaced by a Major from the Army Education Corps in June 1971.⁸³⁵ As a part of maintaining operational security, IRD’s support would now provide a counter to the pro-PFLOAG propaganda being spread outside of Oman by the PDRY and international backers (initially The People’s Republic of China and later the Soviet Union). Activities were very limited in number during 1971 and designed to divide the international backers of PDRY rather than being directed at PFLOAG supporters. In an example from the new IRD material, its Special Operations Section inserted a story into the media through a friendly journalist that purported the Soviets were attempting to gain control of the port of Aden.⁸³⁶ This is interesting as again new IRD files describe the covert operations of the Special Operations Section. In this case, whilst appearing to sow the seeds of distrust between the PDRY and Soviet advisors, the activity was very small scale and the British concluded at the time that the tools available were too “primitive and inadequate” to achieve the objectives set.⁸³⁷ The secret activity was however, considered important enough to be retained from release to the National Archives perversely suggesting that the

⁸³¹ James Worrall, “Transitioning in and out of COIN: Efficiency, Legitimacy and Power in Oman” in Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack (Eds), *At the End of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical, and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover, and Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p 160 and 161.

⁸³² TNA, FCO 168/4129, Counter-Propaganda: Dhofar, 29 January 1971.

⁸³³ TNA, DEFE 25/186 PsyOps in Oman and Dhofar – Up dating SitRep, 19 March 1971.

⁸³⁴ TNA, FCO 168/4129, Counter-Propaganda: Dhofar, 29 January 1971.

⁸³⁵ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013 and TNA, FCO 168/4129 Crawford to Joy, 22 February 1971.

⁸³⁶ TNA, FCO 168/4691 Kós to Welser, 7 June 1971.

⁸³⁷ TNA, FCO 168/6399 IRD Material for Oman, 22 Jun 1972.

hiding of methods was more important than the measuring of the impact. This is probably because of the negative light the use of covert propaganda might have on the image of Britain. At the time, the emphasis on obscuring the British development in Oman made attempts to channel supportive messages through the media difficult, with the unfortunate consequence that a “conspiracy of silence” led journalists in Beirut to use the PDRY Consul for comment when no official British one was forthcoming.⁸³⁸ Whilst the early success of psychological operations had been noteworthy, alone they were not going to defeat PFLOAG and in fact appear to have stalled at this point in a similar fashion as the military component of the campaign.

Efforts to shield Oman and Sultan Qaboos’ image abroad from hostile propaganda were beginning in 1971 but as the campaign continued into 1972 the outcome remained uncertain. In April 1972 the SAF seized Sarfait in the West of Dhofar as a way to block the remainder of Dhofar from PFLOAG influence and cut their supply lines. The combined effects of increasing numbers of SEP but the still precarious state of the Government counter-revolution appears to have led the PFLOAG to sense an opportunity to confront the SAF at this point. In what would be its largest operation of the conflict, the insurgents planned to attack the town of Mirbat to the east of Salalah, demonstrating the groups continued ability to strike Government forces across Dhofar. The attack failed when on 19 July 1972 the insurgents were beaten off by a force of *firqat*, their SAS mentors and repeated air strikes by the Sultan of Oman’s Air Force. Following the unsuccessful attack on Mirbat the Marxist ideological element of PFLOAG appears to have increased. Politics had played a role in PFLOAG’s strategy making since a mutiny in September 1970. This had exposed distinct differences between the ideology of the central leadership and cadres from the Eastern area of Dhofar. Rifts had developed as Marxist doctrine was imposed over religious and tribal customs. The understanding of the tribal landscape by the Government intelligence agencies, the framing of the campaign as a fight between religion and Communism and the adoption by the insurgents of a strict Marxist doctrine, all helped to present Government forces as a better alternative to the insurgents. The 1970 mutiny resulted in the execution of thirty people by their own side.⁸³⁹ Ward recalled the results of a similar incident when the leadership of a PFLOAG cadre identified an individual from another tribal group as disaffected by the revolution and instructed him to move. The individual was sent with a letter of introduction to his new group which the

⁸³⁸ TNA, FCO 168/6399 IRD Material for Oman, 22 Jun 1972.

⁸³⁹ Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* p 267-269.

cadre leaders believed he could not read. More literate than the cadre leaders knew, the insurgent opened the letter to read that it requested his execution. He quickly surrendered to the Government side.⁸⁴⁰ PFLOAG's campaign developed from supporting a local tribal rebellion to attempting to build a Marxist state in Dhofar. This change in strategy alienated the local population and whilst the Government tactics would come to change "from stick to carrot", PFLOAG continued with their approach despite it alienating the very people they were supposed to be fighting for.⁸⁴¹

Propaganda as Diplomacy

Although the large-scale attack at Mirbat had been unsuccessful, PFLOAG had been able to lay siege to the SAF garrison in Sarfait. The isolated garrison presented PFLOAG with another opportunity to defeat the SAF in conventional battle as had been intended at Mirbat. The insurgents benefited from the Soviet Union's replacement of China as its main international backer in 1972 as it led to an increase in the delivery of arms to PFLOAG.⁸⁴² The new direct and indirect fire weapons were soon deployed to bombard the SAF positions at Sarfait. Withdrawal would have cost the Sultan significant prestige and although the British Government had already made commitments to operations in Oman, they "remained...deeply cautious". The British recognised that since its withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971 it did not have, nor could the Omani Government afford, the additional forces required to defeat PFLOAG.⁸⁴³ Although the garrison was eventually relieved, the immediate priority was to keep it supplied so as to hold off insurgent attacks. The defence of Sarfait therein gave an increased importance to diplomatic activities that aimed to persuade other countries to support the Sultan either financially or through the contribution of troops.

Diplomatic activity had steadily helped to gain international recognition for Sultan Qaboos' regime. Oman's joining of the United Nations and Arab League in 1971 projected the image of the country as an independent state rather than a British client. This helped to secure troop contributions by Iran and Jordan and financial contributions by Abu Dhabi,

⁸⁴⁰ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁸⁴¹ Cobain, *The History Thieves* p 88. Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 278-279. Peter Ratcliffe, *Eye of the Storm: 25 Years in Action with the SAS* (London, Michael O'Mara Books, 2019) p 98-99.

⁸⁴² Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 280.

⁸⁴³ Worrall, "Transitioning in and out of COIN" p 161.

Saudi Arabia and others. Arab states no longer looked to the doctrine of Arab nationalism but to “Arab Statism”.⁸⁴⁴ This fresh approach recognised that different countries could exist in the Arab world and would come to define relations between states in the Middle East over the next decade. Overt signalling of Britain’s support in Oman was consistently minimised but Ward’s reflections offer an interesting insight into the way that the downplaying of British assistance was achieved. In this case the Dhofar Information Office or DIO was ostensibly run by a Dhofari, Adul Aziz Mohammad Rawas who served as an interlocutor between the local population and the state. In fact, this was a cover for the psychological operations support provided through the BATT.⁸⁴⁵ As well as minimising signs of British support, new IRD material also records concerns that had it been common knowledge that Ward ran the DIO, its services were unlikely to have been viewed in the same way by local people.⁸⁴⁶ Rawas went on to become the Dhofar Information Officer and later the Minister of Information for the Sultanate.

For the benefits of increased military and economic support to be realised, British officials continued to demand outside support be hidden.⁸⁴⁷ The importance of this measure cannot be understated as failure to do so would provide an opportunity for adversaries to use such support for the Sultan as a propaganda tool. Although there had been some reports in Western media, detailed knowledge of the conflict and Oman’s supporters remained largely unknown to the general public. As SAF successes increased, the Soviet propaganda services attempted to highlight the presence of particularly British and Iranian forces. This was through various pro-Soviet or neutral Arab media organisations in Lebanon, Kuwait and Syria. Radio Moscow’s Arabic and Persian services also broadcast messages such as “[if] British imperialists and their allies did not support the puppet reactionary regime of Qaboos, this puppet regime could not remain in power for long”.⁸⁴⁸ Tass through its English language broadcasts attempted to “alarm the British public into believing that they were being pulled into a Vietnam type situation in Oman”.⁸⁴⁹ Through this indirect political pressure the Soviet Union hoped to see outside assistance withdrawn which might provide PFLOAG with a military advantage over the SAF. This outcome was

⁸⁴⁴ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* p 254.

⁸⁴⁵ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁸⁴⁶ TNA, FCO 168/6900, Annex B to An Appreciation on the Conduct of Psyops on Op Storm, 26 July 1973 and Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 31 August 2013.

⁸⁴⁷ TNA, FCO 8/2006 Oman: Annual Review for 1972.

⁸⁴⁸ Quoted in Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 283.

⁸⁴⁹ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 284.

still considered a possibility by some British officials as they continued to compare the situation in Dhofar with that of Vietnam into the winter of 1972.⁸⁵⁰ This explains the continued interest in keeping outside assistance hidden. Whitehall officials were reassured by a revised concept of operations that was proposed by the new Commander of the SAF, Major General Tim Creasey. This would see the building and manning of defensive barriers with the aim of barring PFLOAG from Central and Eastern Dhofar.

The importance of the fortified lines in Dhofar should not be underestimated as they would finally cut off PFLOAG from reinforcements and supplies. The insurgents would be contained into defined sectors with areas segmented off by physical barriers, fortified positions and minefields. Another significant factor was the military support provided by Iran. The Shah of Iran had become increasingly concerned by events in Oman, as the prospect of a hostile Communist regime across the Gulf would be detrimental to his own security. The Shah's first practical support was the provision of six helicopters that were used to resupply the Sarfait garrison.⁸⁵¹ The Shah went further, ultimately providing a brigade of approximately 3000 men. This was a significant military commitment that helped to tip the balance in favour of Government forces and prevented the conflict continuing as a stalemate.⁸⁵² Estimates of PFLOAG fighters vary but were recorded in 1970 as being around 5000 regular and militia forces.⁸⁵³ Casualties and surrendered personnel saw this figure reduced to approximately 1500 later in the conflict.⁸⁵⁴ Without additional manpower the SAF brigade sized force of approximately 3000 regular troops in Dhofar was tied to garrisoning Sarfait and holding defensive positions. Within its own resources the SAF and the BATT would not have been able to man the new fortified lines and conduct other operations simultaneously. With the arrival of the Iranian Task Force in 1973, the lines could be patrolled while the SAF operated behind them clearing PFLOAG out of Dhofar in stages, supported by the SAS and *firqats*. Although much hard fighting was required by the end of 1973, the Commander of the SAF, General Casey was able to

⁸⁵⁰ TNA, CAB 148/122/37 Minutes of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 21 November 1972.

⁸⁵¹ James Goode, "Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman, 1972-75", *Iranian Studies* 47:3 (2014) p 447 and Geraint Hughes, "'Amateurs Who Play in League Division One'? Anglo-Iranian Military Relations During the Dhofar War in Oman", *British Journal for Military History* 4:1 (2017) p 101.

⁸⁵² Perkins, *A Fortunate Soldier* p 129.

⁸⁵³ JE Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy*, (London: Saqi, 2007) p 218.

⁸⁵⁴ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 163.

report that the initiative had swung in the Government's favour because of this new strategy.⁸⁵⁵

Although the military element of the campaign was about to progress, the information component was simultaneously nearly derailed. IRD files reveal that trouble started in February 1973 when the Director of Radio Salalah, Ahmed Mansouri informed the British Regional Information Officer in Beirut that the "American information service" would be now provide the training for Omani staff in the DIO.⁸⁵⁶ This was viewed as a potential "take-over" by the Americans with implications for British interests. IRD officials also thought it might explain the lack of success in linking supportive Lebanese press contacts with the "Omani Information machine".⁸⁵⁷ This issue was thought to have implications for the wider campaign as without more positive media support through the press in Lebanon, the increasing political, military and economic support for Oman might not be sustained. At the same time as external propaganda was not effectively projecting the campaign, the AIT was performing its role inside Oman poorly. The situation culminated in the removal of the officer in charge of the AIT in July and Ward's return to Oman to review the situation. He produced a series of recommendations to improve the psychological operations apparatus.⁸⁵⁸ Ward's report noted that three factors had adversely affected the output of psychological operations in Dhofar. First, the influential Information Officer, Abdul Aziz, was studying in Britain and his absence had seen a marked reduction in the productivity of the DIO. Second, Ahmed Mansouri (Director of Radio Salalah) had been attempting to gain a position closer to the Sultan and was neglecting his duties. This probably explains why Mansouri had been involved in brokering a deal with the American information services. He may have thought that a successful deal might gain him an advantage in acquiring a post at court. Third, the control of psychological operations had changed from being the responsibility of the Director of Intelligence to that of the G2 (intelligence) staff branch in SAF HQ.⁸⁵⁹ This last factor could actually be seen as a potential benefit to the AIT in the longer term. The change of command responsibilities was likely to have meant more of an interest being taken in their work than was previously possible when working directly to the busy Director of Intelligence. In the short term however, it and the other two

⁸⁵⁵ TNA, DEFE 25/312 Chiefs of Staff Committee Meeting: Future UK Defence Activity in Oman, 23 November 1973.

⁸⁵⁶ It is unclear exactly which US agency is being referred to but it is likely the United States Information Agency. TNA, FCO 168/6900 Berry to Shipman, 15 May 1973 and Joy to Shipman, 1 February 1973.

⁸⁵⁷ TNA, FCO 168/6900 Joy to Shipman, 22 May 1973.

⁸⁵⁸ TNA, FCO 168/6900 Shipman to Joy, 6 August 1973.

⁸⁵⁹ TNA, FCO 168/6900, Annex B to An Appreciation on the Conduct of Psyops on Op Storm, 26 July 1973.

factors had caused confusion and disagreements between the different organisations which had resulted in a generally poor performance of psychological operations.

Correspondence between the Regional Information Officer (an IRD post) and the British Embassy in Oman reveal that little if any progress had been made in improving the information services in Dhofar between March and June 1973.⁸⁶⁰ The post of a British Information Adviser to the central Omani Government had previously been suggested and was now discussed again. It was thought that such a post would better coordinate resources and output. In the interim, John Ward's return to Oman was considered "ideal" by IRD as new files reveal.⁸⁶¹ This new information is important in supporting Ward's own recollections, highlighting the high regard he was held in by IRD and the significance of the role he carried out. Despite the slow progress and administrative problems IRD and FCO officials were confident that the situation was now stabilised and that the output would improve.⁸⁶² A fresh AIT had been deployed in the summer of 1973 and was the first to be selected for their specific skills rather than simply posted in. The team commander was introduced to the Wali of Dhofar by Ward and although technical and other office accommodation was inadequate for the task, it was slowly being improved.⁸⁶³ Technology was also improving with a bigger radio transmitter procured that now had the ability to broadcast to areas of Dhofar that had previously been unreachable. It was agreed that Abdul Aziz would assume responsibility for both the information and broadcast work, becoming the Director of Information Dhofar with daily access to the Wali. Combined with some administrative changes in the Wali of Dhofar's office, this meant that the DIO was now more influential and efficient than it had previously been.

Although progress had been slow by the middle of 1973 British officials were convinced that its covert propaganda support to the campaign in Oman was improving. The pace of development in the information services chimes somewhat with an assessment of covert action made by George Young, a former Vice Chief of SIS. He wrote that with regard to the progress of covert action "one must not think in terms of spectacular coups, or dramatic feats of irregular warfare, but rather of a continuous sapping process."⁸⁶⁴ Like

⁸⁶⁰ TNA, FCO 168/6399 Correspondents between Regional Information Officer Beirut and British Embassy Muscat, 29 March and 22 June 1972.

⁸⁶¹ TNA, FCO 168/6900 Shipman to Joy, 6 August 1973.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

⁸⁶³ TNA, FCO 168/6900, Annex B to An Appreciation on the Conduct of Psyops on Op Storm, 26 July 1973.

⁸⁶⁴ Rory Cormac, *George Kennedy Young: Banker, Writer, Soldier, Spy* in Engelsberg Ideas, 14 December 2020, <https://engelsbergideas.com/spy-week/george-kennedy-young-banker-writer-soldier-spy/>, accessed on 24 August 2022.

the military strategy in Oman, the political warfare component had taken time to develop. Its outputs could now be more usefully integrated with other areas such as civil development to produce effects greater than the sum of the parts. This would provide the British with a way to transition from a high degree of support to the Sultan to a different relationship which retained a measure of influence.

Development and Transition, 1974-1977

The creation of fortified lines such as the Hornbeam line, completed in August 1974, significantly reduced PFLOAG's ability to supply the insurgents in the areas beyond it. The interconnected and mutually supportive positions were extremely difficult to cross even by small groups let alone the large caravans that were required to bring supplies from across the border in South Yemen. The physical barrier now separating PFLOAG from the population of Dhofar was a "critical" element in the victory of the Government forces and their allies.⁸⁶⁵ Although the imposition of the lines was a turning point in the conflict, the general assumption in both Oman and the UK was that the campaign could continue for some time. In February 1974 a general election in Britain saw the return of a minority Labour Government. The backdrop to the election was one of economic crisis and the new Government was unwilling to commit further resources to Oman and indeed a Defence Review due to report in 1975 would likely mean cuts to MOD resources in general.⁸⁶⁶ While direct British support was likely to reduce, diplomatic, military and economic factors in Oman now came together to change the balance decisively in favour of Sultan Qaboos.⁸⁶⁷ Diplomatically, the Qaboos regime was now internationally recognised and legitimised, with military support provided by Britain, Iran and Jordan. The growth in oil production in Oman meant at a time of surging global demand, the Omani state was significantly richer than it had previously been. Expensive civil development which had been deprioritised in favour of military operations to secure the ground from PFLOAG could now begin.⁸⁶⁸

The dramatic reversal of fortunes for the Omani Government had been cemented by PFLOAG choosing to launch conventional military operations against the fortified Hornbeam line. While this strategy made use of the heavy weapons that the USSR and

⁸⁶⁵ DeVore, "A More Complex and Conventional Victory" p 159.

⁸⁶⁶ Ovendale (Ed), *British Defence Policy Since 1945* p 14.

⁸⁶⁷ Worrall, "Transitioning in and out of COIN" p 162.

⁸⁶⁸ Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies* p 344.

the PDRY continued to supply, it played to the advantage of the Government forces and their allies. These forces were relatively well protected by defensive 'sangers' and could deploy their own firepower against the unprotected insurgents attempting to attack them. The PFLOAG strategy also provided an opportunity for Government propaganda to attack their credibility. In one example an attack against Salalah airfield was reported by Aden Radio as destroying several aircraft and causing mass casualties.⁸⁶⁹ The airfield was close to the town of Salalah and many civilians worked there and so the Government's reporting that the claims were untrue, were easily verified and this helped to build trust in its sources. Either complacency or mistaken enthusiasm damaged the credibility of PFLOAG at a time when the Omani Government could truthfully report that the security situation was improving and civil development was taking place in Dhofar. The early psychological operations had made no promises of rapid "positive benefits" instead focusing on the atheist insurgents and Islam's link to the Sultan's rule.⁸⁷⁰ IRD record that as late as April 1974 the FCO were concerned that "Oman could...still win the war but lose the peace".⁸⁷¹ With increasing areas of Dhofar able to be cleared of PFLOAG however Civil Action Teams (CAT's) could start to be deployed. These made use of the tribal understanding of the various *firqats* to locate water sources for the population and their livestock. These sites could then become Government 'hubs' where a range of services could be provided to the local people.⁸⁷² The provision of such development integrated the Dhofari population into the fabric of Omani society and effectively broke any claims by PFLOAG that they offered a better future than the Government.

A "Propaganda Wizard" and the Development of Political Warfare in Oman⁸⁷³

The campaign in Dhofar showed the importance of time in capability development and implementation across a number of areas including political warfare. Like the diplomatic, military and economic instruments, information services also needed time and money to develop the organisation and methods that were most effective. Even in the fourth year of the conflict the informational component (including the covert aspects of political warfare) was not yet fully optimised to support Government activity. The new Regional Information Officer in Beirut, Anthony (Tony) Ashworth sensed an opportunity to develop Omani

⁸⁶⁹ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 288.

⁸⁷⁰ Jones, "Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar" p 634.

⁸⁷¹ TNA, FCO 168/7224 Hawley to Wright, 23 Apr 1974.

⁸⁷² Akehurst, *We Won a War* p 61-63 and 77-78.

⁸⁷³ Mawby, "The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism" p 176.

information services, building on his previous experience as the Information Adviser to the Aden High Commissioner.⁸⁷⁴ After leaving Aden in 1967, he had served for four years as the First Secretary (Information) in Hong Kong and then spent a year in London, probably in the headquarters of IRD.⁸⁷⁵ He was appointed to the British Embassy in Beirut in January 1974. Ashworth's opinion is recorded in recently released IRD files as being that, "the conventional structure of an Information Department cannot be expected to cope with...a situation [a subversive threat to the state of Oman]...[when it] is not designed to carry out what amounts to political warfare".⁸⁷⁶ This is useful as it helps to show how the political warfare campaign did not progress in a linear fashion but could rapidly evolve when driven by events or particular individuals, in this case Tony Ashworth. His suggestion was the reorganisation of the Omani Ministry of Information in an effort to better wage political warfare requiring, "special measures to be taken to concentrate, direct and coordinate the government's propaganda effort".⁸⁷⁷ Going beyond his original brief to provide a draft information policy for the Sultan, Ashworth pushed for more radical changes that aimed to play up divisions in PFLOAG using unattributable methods in a similar way as he had in South Arabia.⁸⁷⁸

In March 1974 Ashworth visited the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) to assess the possibilities for IRD to operate in the country. Interestingly from the new IRD material Ashworth's report records that he took the opportunity to meet with a former adversary, Abdulla al Asnag, who had been the leader of the Arab nationalist FLOSY group in South Arabia.⁸⁷⁹ Unfortunately no details of the meeting are present in the file. In April Ashworth proposed an operation to use forged pamphlets from a World Peace Conference to be held in the PDRY.⁸⁸⁰ These documents would purportedly show divisions within the PFLOAG leadership.⁸⁸¹ John Ward's recollections provide evidence that forgery had already been used at the tactical level in the campaign. A SEP had given Ward a PFLOAG stamp that was used to authenticate written orders.⁸⁸² The stamp was replicated and used to frank fake letters to PFLOAG cadres. These messages were designed to

⁸⁷⁴ See chapter three of this thesis for Ashworth's background and work in South Arabia.

⁸⁷⁵ John Beasant (and Christopher Ling and Ian Cummins), *Oman: The-Life Drama and Intrigue of an Arab State* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007) p 176.

⁸⁷⁶ TNA, FCO 168/7224 Ashworth report to Omani Minister of Information, 16 May 1974.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ TNA, FCO 168/7224 Information Work on Oman, 18 May 1974.

⁸⁷⁹ TNA, FCO 174/13 Report on a Visit to the Yemen Arab Republic, 28 March 1974.

⁸⁸⁰ TNA, FCO 168/5462 Ashworth to Joy, 9 April 1974.

⁸⁸¹ TNA, FCO 168/5462 Ashworth to Kós, 24 August 1974.

⁸⁸² Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

divide the groups in a similar way as was suggested by Ashworth in 1974. These examples suggest the use of forged documents to shape or change perceptions was more widespread in political warfare than has previously been thought.

The risk of the forged documents being discovered and attributed to the UK was discussed but the operation was authorised.⁸⁸³ Five-hundred copies of the pamphlet were produced and mailed to Middle Eastern countries from Helsinki but in the end the conference was postponed and no other reference was made to the effect of the pamphlets.⁸⁸⁴ Again, the IRD files are important in providing evidence of the use of forged material purported to be from an international organisation. As well as changing the narrative that IRD did not carry out such activities, as had been the case in South Arabia, the actual outcome of many operations does not appear to have been measured. Although there was evidence of divisions within PFLOAG's external supporters, the lack of any measurement of such operations makes it difficult to quantify the impact they had. Whilst the political situation in the PDRY was chaotic this was as a result of economic productivity dropping and fractional splits hindering Government action.⁸⁸⁵ IRD operations may have exacerbated such divisions but at present this remains uncertain. The Soviet Union stepped into financially support the PDRY Government but could not put an end to the fractional fighting. Relations between the two states worsened in 1975 and supplies to PFLOAG were reduced as a result with no apparent action by Britain actually needed.⁸⁸⁶

Given the inability to conclusively identify the impact of Ashworth's special operations, his principal contribution to the campaign was actually in lobbying for and then contribution to a significant report on the long-term develop of Dhofar. The report, which was included in IRD's files, was authored by the former diplomat, Sir Gawain Bell and published in November 1974. The inclusion of a large number of recommendations for the better coordination of information services and counter-propaganda was almost certainly the result of Ashworth's work.⁸⁸⁷ The aims for information and counter-propaganda built on previous projects including the radio soundbite, 'freedom is our aim, and Islam is our way'. This slogan had been devised earlier in the campaign but became a familiar radio catch

⁸⁸³ TNA, FCO 168/5462 Wright to Baker, 8 October 1974.

⁸⁸⁴ TNA, FCO 168/5462 Joy letter, 6 January 1975 and WPC Conference Aden, 12 February 1975.

⁸⁸⁵ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB and the World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005) p 214.

⁸⁸⁶ TNA, 174/30 reports by HM Embassy on 21 June and 5 July 1975.

⁸⁸⁷ TNA, FCO 168/7224 Summary of Recommendations, 15 November 1974.

phrase, epitomising the move to developing national unity under the Sultan.⁸⁸⁸ With the insurgency confined to a corner of Oman, political warfare could support the programme of modernising the state which went well beyond the basic incentivisation of supposed hearts and minds methods. The Bell report helps to explain the role of political warfare in supporting this development phase in the campaign.⁸⁸⁹ This support was crucial if the security successes were to become embedded in the wider development of the province and then the whole country.

Information and counter-propaganda recommendations warranted a separate section of the report, suggesting that the measures were considered as important in increasing and maintaining support for the Sultan as the defeat of PFLOAG.⁸⁹⁰ The Bell report noted the success of the DIO but that it required “[i]ts organisation...[to] be systemised” with the central Ministry of Information. It is noteworthy that visits by the international media were specifically mentioned, a significant change from previous efforts to exclude journalists from visiting the area. Such visits would “utilise the excellent propaganda outlets provided by the Oman Embassies abroad” to help shape international opinion.⁸⁹¹ This demonstrated a level of synchronisation, with the previous diplomatic effort first legalising the state of Oman (showing it was not a British client) which could now be used to assist other areas of Government action. This again demonstrates how the activities of political warfare successfully supported other elements throughout the campaign.

Military operations continued into 1975 with a series of SAF offensives towards the border with the PDRY which ended the “year of decision” as called by the new Commander of the SAF, Major General Perkins.⁸⁹² The narrative of a national rebirth was a propaganda device that not only emphasised the legitimacy of Sultan Qaboos’ reign but also that the state was powerful, cementing the effective military campaign that had been won over PFLOAG.⁸⁹³ With a friendly British ally firmly established in Oman, Britain’s role now changed from an interventionist mode at the beginning to an influential advisory role at its end.⁸⁹⁴ By November 1975 the last PFLOAG units withdrew from Oman into South Yemen and the following month Brigadier Akehurst, the Commander of the Dhofar Brigade, wrote

⁸⁸⁸ Tugwell, *Revolutionary Propaganda and Possible Counter-Measures* p 288.

⁸⁸⁹ TNA, FCO 168/7224 Summary of Recommendations, 15 November 1974 p 1.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid* p 2.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid* p 3.

⁸⁹² Kenneth Perkins, “Oman 1975: The Year of decision”, *Royal United Services Institute Journal* 124:1 (1979).

⁸⁹³ Worrall, “Transitioning in and out of COIN” p 164-165.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

to Sultan Qaboos that Dhofar had been secured and development could begin in earnest.⁸⁹⁵

Britain's Enduring Influence in Oman

Sultan Qaboos declared the conflict in Oman officially over in December 1975, although military operations against PFLOAG insurgents inside Oman continued into 1976. The British military's Operation Storm came to an end in September. The significant British Government support for Oman ended in 1977 but training and advice across a number of fields continued to be provided for years afterwards.⁸⁹⁶ As part of the process of developing the Omani state gradual improvements in Oman's information services were supported by IRD and there was a drive to increase the number of Omanis in senior positions as newly released British records show.⁸⁹⁷ The DIO became an established part of the Sultanate Government's structure, within the Omani Ministry of Information. Previously it had been paid for by the Wali of Dhofar's Office and had attracted little central Government attention.⁸⁹⁸ Although there had been an 'Omanisation', British advisors, including in information services, continued to work in the country although these posts were now as contractors to the Omani, not British Government. For example, John Ward was the Information Advisor to the Wali of Dhofar until 1980 when he returned to the UK.⁸⁹⁹ Tony Ashworth stayed for much longer, first as the Advisor to the Minister for Information and then as a 'consultant'.⁹⁰⁰ The change in title was highly likely a reflection of the changing way that non-Omani roles in the Sultan's Government were presented.⁹⁰¹

A move to increasing the number of contracted rather than loaned British personnel extended beyond the information services to security elements too. The *firqat* helped to form the Sultan's Special Forces in 1976 and they were mentored by ex-British military personnel employed by a new company called KMS Ltd or Keenie Meenie Services.⁹⁰² This evocatively named company was formed by Jim Johnson who had organised the

⁸⁹⁵ Higgins, *With the SAS and Other Animals* p 200.

⁸⁹⁶ Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* p 160 and Worrall, "Between Withdrawal and Greater Engagement" p 166.

⁸⁹⁷ TNA, FCO 168/7336, Material for Dhofar Information Department, 9 June 1975.

⁸⁹⁸ Ward, Private lectures to 15 (United Kingdom) Psychological Operations Group, Chicksands, 21 February 2014.

⁸⁹⁹ TNA, FCO 168/7336 Galloway to Roberts, 9 March 1975.

⁹⁰⁰ "Young Britons Hold the Line in Oman" *The Times*, 30 April 1981.

⁹⁰¹ Beasant (with Ling and Cummins), *Oman* p 176.

⁹⁰² Tony Geraghty, *Guns for Hire: The Inside Story of Freelancing Soldering* (London: Portrait, 2007) p 120.

mercenary operations in Yemen and Mike Wingate Gray, a former SAS officer.⁹⁰³ The presence of British advisors, contracted personnel and private companies is reflective of organisational changes to Britain's covert and discreet actors too. The ways and means seen through these changes could be interpreted as a form of 'soft power'.⁹⁰⁴ Where Britain had relied on its economic and military power in the past this had been steadily reduced in the Gulf during the 1970s. The employment of former Government personnel by newly independent countries in the area could help to fill the gap.⁹⁰⁵ The level of influence that the continuing presence of people like Ashworth generated for the British Government is impossible to accurately calculate but it certainly helped.⁹⁰⁶ Such people were cheaper than the maintenance of a British Government capability but the individual's links to their native country provided a form of continued influence within Oman.

The use of political warfare throughout the Oman campaign heralded the changing ways that the British Government would engage with Oman, the Gulf and wider Middle East. British national interests were maintained even as its ability to achieve them through direct hard power declined. Where a degree of influence could be preserved through informal networks, a cost-effective way to "mask decline and [continue to] project influence" was possible.⁹⁰⁷ This informal arrangement would however in no way meet the criteria of "pre-eminence" that had been possible in the nineteenth century and hoped for into the 1950s.⁹⁰⁸ Moving towards the end of the 1970s however, this different form of engagement reinvented the way that Britain could maintain an element of influence in Oman (and the Gulf) that did not require a permanent and overt British presence previously thought necessary. The British Government's support for Sultan Qaboos from 1970 charts these changes; first through the covert supporting of the coup; then by diplomatic, discreet military and informational support which continued beyond the end of the conflict. British support had not been in the numbers deployed but in the leadership of the campaign and as a facilitator that made use of Omani resources (including money) to achieve the Sultan's objectives.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰³ Phil Miller, *Keenie Meenie: The British Mercenaries Who Got Away With Murder* (London: Pluto Press, 2020) p 7-8 and 19.

⁹⁰⁴ Emile Nakhleh, "Propaganda and Power in the Middle East", *Current History* 112:758 (2013) p 356 and Robert Winder, *Soft Power: The New Great Game* (London: Little, Brown, 2020) p 50.

⁹⁰⁵ Philips and Hunt, "Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen" p 657.

⁹⁰⁶ Clive Jones and John Stone, "Britain and the Arabian Gulf: New Perspectives on Strategic Influence", *International Relations* 13:4 (1997) p 23.

⁹⁰⁷ Rory Cormac, *How to Stage a Coup: And Ten Other Lessons from the World of Secret Statecraft* (London: Atlantic Books, 2022) p 17.

⁹⁰⁸ Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* p 153.

⁹⁰⁹ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 226.

The relationship with the Sultan and the influence that British loan service and contracted personnel wielded, did mean that the objectives envisaged also helped to secure British national interests. These being, preventing the fall of an anti-Communist leader in an area seen as vital to UK and Western interests, while overtly withdrawing its military forces stationed in the Gulf but preserving British influence.⁹¹⁰ Soft power with hard edges was a fundamental part of delivering long term success in Oman but not in the way that has traditionally seen the SAS activities as in the lead.⁹¹¹ A Chiefs of Staff report from February 1970 emphasised that a campaign in Oman would ultimately succeed through a “political accommodation” with the local population.⁹¹² The SAS were but one part of a comprehensive strategy that was informed by Britain’s own national interests and aimed to not repeat the mistakes made in South Arabia.⁹¹³ The campaign was made up of multiple elements and some like the military component have been carefully considered by historians. Others, like the political warfare aspect or information component of the campaign have had limited investigation partly as a result of the emphasis on the SAS. This is unfortunate as an interpretation of the campaign through the lens of political warfare helps to contextualise it as part of Britain’s broader pursuit of its national interests during the Cold War. As such the campaign in Oman was the proxy of a wider international confrontation in which ideas could generate “fierce...struggle”.⁹¹⁴ Following the formal British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971 and the ending of the campaign in Oman by 1977, the presence of serving and former British Government personnel would help to maintain influence in the area that continues to this day.⁹¹⁵

Conclusion

The traditional view, promulgated by the British literature on Oman, is of a model of counter-insurgency practice. In fact, as was the case in other British campaigns, the conflict in Oman saw conventional military capabilities used as the primary way to defeat an insurgency, not a so-called hearts and minds led approach.⁹¹⁶ Indeed, in the specific circumstances of Oman, civil development could only occur once the SAF had removed

⁹¹⁰ Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 221.

⁹¹¹ Winder, *Soft Power* p 50 and Connor, *Ghost Force* p 171.

⁹¹² TNA, FCO 46/609 Chiefs of Staff Report Annex The Employment of an SAS Squadron in Dhofar, 28 February 1970.

⁹¹³ Worrall, *Statebuilding and counterinsurgency in Oman* p 222.

⁹¹⁴ Winder, *Soft Power* p 12.

⁹¹⁵ Philips and Hunt, “Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen” p 657.

⁹¹⁶ Porch, *Counterinsurgency* p 266-267.

PFLOAG from the ground and when oil revenue could fund such a programme. The political warfare campaign in Oman operated in the way doctrinally it had been envisaged, “supporting...military action...designed to influence...the opinions, emotions, attitudes and behaviours of enemy, neutral and friendly groups”.⁹¹⁷ This was possible because intelligence material was produced that facilitated psychological operations to be attuned to selected audiences. This demonstrated a marked improvement in the way intelligence could support political warfare. It was through a successful strategy that a significant threat to British interests was defeated without recourse to a full-blown counter-insurgency operation. Avoiding this had been a primary objective of Britain’s concept of operating in Oman.⁹¹⁸

The recollections provided by John Ward show that political warfare supported the conventional fight by the SAF, helping to legitimise Sultan Qaboos and counter adversary propaganda. His recollections not only include new insights but are supported by recently released IRD records. Together these show that like other aspects of British support, the activities of political warfare were deliberately hidden. Two considerations arise from these revelations. First, the evidence changes previous interpretations that IRD did not carry out black propaganda activities. In fact it did and the retention of files hid these activities for decades, altering the historical narrative. Second, and perhaps even more interestingly, there was almost no measurement of the actual impact such operations had. This apparent lack of interest in understanding the actual impact of activity is astonishing and leaves questions as to why such operations were authorised without being able to show what the result was. As in South Arabia, the archive material provides much greater detail of British practice including the use of unattributable or black propaganda and forgery. The similarities between practices in South Arabia and Oman is not surprising given that key personnel served in both campaigns. Ward’s recollections included the interception of mail, the practicalities of hiding British support and the interaction of tactical and strategic political warfare. The campaign approach minimised the number of British personnel actually deployed to Oman, instead making the greatest impact through leadership and ideas. This makes the role of particular individuals potentially more significant than in other campaigns. Ward’s contribution to the fledgling psychological operations in 1970 and later work in the DIO are examples of this. Through his personal

⁹¹⁷ TNA, WO 279/649, Land Operations Volume III – Counter Revolutionary Operations Part I – Principles and General Aspects p 107.

⁹¹⁸ Geraint Hughes, “The Unwanted War? Britain and the Conflict in Dhofar, Oman” *Institute of Historical Research*, 2 November 2021.

reflections and new archival material, it is possible to investigate the campaign through a new lens, that of political warfare and therein showing its successful support.

Using the subject of political warfare as the frame for study helps to analyse events beyond an immediate period and investigate Government decisions across campaigns. Through this it is argued that the campaigns in South Arabia and Oman must be seen as linked. The choice to withdraw from South Arabia and then from East of Suez “raised the stakes” by encouraging a Communist expansion led by the PDRY and supported by other Communist backers.⁹¹⁹ This development directly threatened British interests which necessitated intervention. The overt British deployment in South Arabia had been seen as increasing tension in the region and there was no wish to repeat the type of campaign conducted there. As a carefully calibrated strategy the campaign in Oman was actually all about sending messages.⁹²⁰ By avoiding an overt deployment to Oman, the British prevented an escalation of tensions and succeeded in a way that had not been possible in either South Arabia or in the contemporary conflict in Vietnam. Importantly it demonstrated that the British Government would still act to secure its national interests but in novel ways.

The changes to the way Britain engaged in Oman and the Gulf during the 1970s, challenges the idea that British decline was inevitable. The most important phase of the Oman conflict occurred during the single term government of Edward Heath. His term was characterised by foreign, economic and defence interests shifting towards a more European and NATO centric posture which continued under the subsequent Labour Government of 1974-1979. The campaign in Oman did not alter the direction of change in British overseas policy but it challenges some interpretations that Britain simply stopped engaging in the Middle East after the official withdrawal in 1971.⁹²¹ A number of reviews during the 1960s attempted to rationalise Britain’s overseas commitments. This resulted in the withdrawal of Britain’s overt military installations like the Aden base but “the East of Suez *presence* [author’s emphasis]...never truly ceased”.⁹²² What the study of political warfare shows is that while any formal and indeed informal rule in a colonial sense had ended, an influential British position did remain albeit with the ways of engagement

⁹¹⁹ Devore, “A More Complex and Conventional Victory” p 165.

⁹²⁰ Cormac, *How to Stage a Coup* p 187.

⁹²¹ Harrison, *Britain in the Middle East 1619-1971* (the section dealing with 1958-1971 is less than three pages long), Mangold *What the British Did* which telling calls its section from 1971 ‘Just a Trading Nation’ p 251.

⁹²² James, “Global Britain’s Strategic Problem East of Suez” p 172.

changed. In scale Britain's effort in Oman was much smaller than in South Arabia and indeed in other counter-insurgency operations, yet this limited contribution was successful. As an effective supporting element of the campaign in Oman, the implied failure of British political warfare in South Arabia can now be compared and contrasted in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion and Reflections

The release of a large number of documents into The National Archives detailing the work of the Information Research Department (IRD) has allowed this thesis to analyse Britain's use of political warfare through two campaigns, Aden and Dhofar. The new material has been used in combination with other sources to provide fresh insight into Britain's policy and strategy in the Middle East between 1959-77. As explained through the analysis of the apparatus of political warfare in the post war period, Britain's approach to the capability evolved in the context of the Cold War. Britain's position in the Middle East was important to this global confrontation but threats emerged at the regional level that challenged its limited number of tools. In the 1950s and 60s, the attempt to convert formal or even informal power into continued influence had floundered when the British tried to fight Arab nationalism through overt military and economic means at a time when these tools were weakened or open to criticism.⁹²³ Political warfare was viewed as the way that Britain could counter its enemies as other tools diminished.

This concluding chapter will analyse failure and success through Britain's engagement, withdrawal and then re-engagement in Southern Arabia. To continue to wield influence that would allow Britain to achieve its policy goals in the Middle East during the 1960s, political warfare was thought to usefully counter the attacks of Arab nationalists, most significantly President Nasser. The failure of this approach in South Arabia is illuminated by the new IRD files. These not only explain the novel and far more unattributable use of political warfare by Britain but also the failures to adequately support the methods of propaganda, psychological and other special operations. This lack of support was not simply a failure of one capability such as the provision of intelligence but points to systemic failures in the way the Government made decisions. Problems with the machinery of government were exacerbated by reactive changes to policy that occurred between 1965-67. That the methods of political warfare were more effective during the subsequent campaign in Oman, when Britain had supposedly withdrawn from East of Suez, suggests that it was not the activities that were at fault but other factors that explain success or failure.

⁹²³ Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire* p 129.

Political warfare through its goal of altering an opponent's perspective, behaviour or attitude in favour of one's own interests should have been at the heart of delivering success in both campaigns. Instead, the often incoherent policy and resulting strategic muddle toward South Arabia during the 1960s was as a result of inexperience, incompetence and the failure of the machinery of government which exacerbated an already challenging situation for Britain. Political choices and the effect of bureaucratic processes therefore start to explain how political warfare could fail in one campaign but succeed in another. Further, it has been argued in this thesis that in Aden a counter-subversive not counter-insurgency strategy was pursued. The counter-subversion approach was more defensive and reactive to the attacks of Arab nationalism than the strategy that unfolded in Oman. In Dhofar deliberate efforts were made to use political warfare to build the legitimacy of Sultan Qaboos' Government and was synchronised with other tools to attract both rebels and the local population. Through understanding the key differences in the two campaigns' design and execution this conclusion helps to explain why political warfare failed to support counter-subversion in one but was more successful within a counter-insurgency framework in another. This approach allows for this study to add to the existing body of work on British counter-insurgency through the study of political warfare.

Political Warfare in Aden and Dhofar: Not two sides of the same COIN

The original research question for this thesis was to explain why British political warfare appeared to fail in Aden but succeed in Dhofar between 1959 and 1977. This was to investigate Britain's activities in the Middle East at a time of significant change, where having removed hard power, soft power capabilities attempted to replace it. By deliberately linking Aden and Dhofar the thesis could explore Britain's use of political warfare across two very different campaigns. The research drew on the themes of British policy and strategy during the middle of the Cold War. It considered why Britain appeared to retreat from its responsibilities in Southern Arabia and why two campaigns could appear to have such different results. It is in the analysis of the different approaches to the two campaigns, that the reasons behind the failure of political warfare in one and success in the other can be drawn out.

The actual methods of political warfare were similar across a number of post Second World War British campaigns. Political warfare primarily worked through a combination of

written, verbal and visual means to coerce a target audience into changing its perspective, behaviours or attitudes. Building on the research of others, using IRD and DFP (Directorate of Forward Plans) records and information from a practitioner during the Oman campaign, it is possible to see Britain's increasing use of covert ways to deliver political warfare in Southern Arabia during the 1960s and 70s. The British made use of forged documents to incite divisions in opposition groups, the interception of mail to identify targets for counter-propaganda and obscured its continuing influence as it ostensibly withdrew from East of Suez. The use of such ways and means provided an alternative to direct military action as the use of open force became constrained by the British economy and global public opinion. The approach made use of methods that the British had developed before and during the Second World War. For the campaigns in Aden and Dhofar these were specifically the propaganda created by the IRD and psychological warfare/operations, community relations and deception delivered by the DFP.

British political warfare activities developed a layered approach, in that IRD propaganda would be directed to external audiences, whereas the DFP and the likes of John Ward in Oman pursued audiences internal to the campaign area. Whether through IRD's material, community relations projects or other special operations, activities needed to be targeted in order that they reached the correct audience, via the right medium, to implement a change in perception, behaviour or attitude. While technological evolution increased the reach of political warfare, the methods themselves did not undergo revolutionary change over the two campaigns. That political warfare could be more successful in a later campaign, points to failure relating to factors beyond the methods themselves. In particular, political warfare needed intelligence because it provided an understanding of the environment beyond the enemy centric approach in conventional conflict. Activities such as psychological operations required a much greater level of detailed information on "political, religious, social, economic and psychological as well as the military characteristics and conditions of whatever groups, races or nationalities form the potential target".⁹²⁴ Through this insight into different groups, the security forces were better prepared to wield influence and control. This was because opportunities for the building or breaking of alliances and identifying actions that would resonate with different groups was only possible through such knowledge.

⁹²⁴ The War Office, *The Staff Officers Guide to Psychological Operations* p 7.

In Dhofar intelligence support meant a better understanding of the tribal structure and dynamics. This intelligence meant that psychological operations were targeted at the most appropriate audiences. As with other aspects of the Dhofar campaign, the propaganda and psychological operations activities built a “working partnership” between the participants, British and Omani.⁹²⁵ This differed significantly from the experience in South Arabia where some British attitudes to the local people were scathing. This lack of comprehension meant that some British officials used crude stereotypes to inform their judgement, meaning assessments were reached from personal opinions and not evidence. For intelligence officials such cognitive biases could prevent or hinder analysis from drawing accurate conclusions, for example the potential to not give agency to local actors and so assess incorrectly the actual drivers behind events.⁹²⁶ In the case of South Arabia, JIC assessments that the insurgency had to be backed by the Egyptian Intelligence Service meant that the internal opposition groups (FLOSY, the NLF and PSP) were viewed as tools of the Egyptians and not the primary adversary.⁹²⁷ Such logic prevented consideration that conditions imposed by Britain could be a factor in the conflict. This stymied any possibility of developing different courses of action to target the insurgency groups themselves. In the realm of producing messages to alter another person’s perspective, such simplistic caricatures could be highly damaging. Through intelligence assessments that used stereotypical characteristics to inform psychological operations, the wrong audiences could be identified as targets. Seeing the local population as without the agency to challenge the British position did just that and misaligned the information campaign resulting in it failing.

When correctly targeted, political warfare (with its emphasis on the calibrated use of a range of means to compel an opponent to change direction) should have been the glue that held a cross government approach together in Southern Arabia. The study of British official manuals has not produced a single volume that deals directly with political warfare. Analysis of the various Government handbooks on counter-insurgency does however show that the use of the various methods was covered in some detail. Counter-insurgency in particular necessitated cross departmental activities and the coordination of the

⁹²⁵ Worrall, “Between Withdrawal and Greater Engagement” p 165.

⁹²⁶ David Omand, *How Spies Think: Ten Lessons in Intelligence* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020) p 115.

⁹²⁷ Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 122-123. For particular JIC assessments on the Egyptian backing of the insurgency see TNA, CAB 158/54 JIC (64) 77, 8 March 1965 and CAB 158/63 JIC (66) 37, 25 May 1966.

elements of political warfare is described in military doctrine from the time of the two campaigns. Whilst political warfare was reorganised during the Cold War and during specific counter-insurgency campaigns, no single organ to integrate and synchronise activities was created. This prevented politicians and officials from directing activity across Government and prioritising resources. The closest entity constructed by the British Government in order to coordinate elements of political warfare was the Joint Action Committee (JAC). Even this body, which both IRD and DFP were members of during the campaign in South Arabia, failed to achieve the successful combining of different activities that could make them greater than the sum of the parts.

The very machinery of government proved a barrier to success as the careful calibration of risk and opportunities were lost in bureaucracy. This inertia had an impact for political warfare because outside of special cases like the JAC, the system of formulating policy and strategy often relied on consensus-based decision making in Whitehall. In the face of strong disagreement or a lack of political direction, such a system could cease to function as was the case in South Arabia where policy drifted. Developing and communicating a clear plan for the future of South Arabia would have meant that political warfare could be more effectively deployed. The lack of such a plan meant that opportunities to support the idea of a federation during the early 1960s or to later synchronise the information campaign with successful covert action in Yemen were not effectively pursued. Had clear direction on the future of South Arabia been developed and centralised oversight available to measure its delivery, then political warfare activities might have better targeted the local population. What the new IRD records reveal is that instead of a carefully orchestrated political warfare campaign, unattributable activities attempted to counter Egyptian propaganda in isolation to any offer of a better future under the Federation. This was the opposite approach to that of Oman where, after 1970, British political warfare focused on building the legitimacy of the Sultan and his state. The emphasis on slow capacity building before handing over to Omanis was in stark contrast to South Arabia where the Federation could be painted as a British constructed vehicle for continued influence and therein lacking legitimacy. In the campaign in Oman influence was pursued as a means to an end, rather than an end in its own right as had been the case in South Arabia.

Beyond the problem of coordinating cross government action, the system of British governance was inherently pragmatic, ideally allowing decision makers to consider a

range of options before making a choice.⁹²⁸ This was supposed to increase flexibility in Government policy but unfortunately provided politicians and officials with the ability to put off making firm decisions.⁹²⁹ The resulting lack of direction made the delivery of successful political warfare almost impossible as was the case in South Arabia. Without a plan for the development of the Federation, political warfare could not signal British intentions allowing a void to develop that Egyptian and opposition groups successfully filled. Limitations in the British system were recognised in early 1970 when there was a pressing need to increase support to the Sultan of Oman. Officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognised that beyond departmental level decisions was likely to “be bogged down forever”.⁹³⁰ That a more successful outcome was achieved in Oman reflects not simply recognition of structural weaknesses in Whitehall but that only pressing events could force reappraisal. These changes created the conditions for political warfare to be successfully employed within the specific counter-insurgency model developed in Oman.

Counter-Insurgency and Political Warfare

The Cold War and decolonisation saw the re-creation and development of political warfare methods in order that Britain could maintain some form of influence as it overtly withdrew from its colonies or areas of informal empire. A much more realistic interpretation of historical British counter-insurgency has emerged over the last decade that takes account of the inherent violence in any confrontation involving armed groups (be they state or irregular ones). The new interpretation of British counter-insurgency has challenged the notion that campaigns were fought in a less violent manner, instead winning the local populations hearts and minds. It is now recognised that British practice used force and intimidation to compel different groups to act or behave in a certain way.⁹³¹ Political warfare was a useful tool where the military lacked sufficient resources to force a group back under government control and instead needed to implement changes in the political arena. In order for the situation to be stabilised sufficiently for the insurgency to be defeated, the ruling group must be legitimate in the eyes of the population, security must

⁹²⁸ D George Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775-1975* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) p 176.

⁹²⁹ Peter Ricketts, *Hard Choices: What Britain Does Next* (London: Atlantic Books, 2021) p 126.

⁹³⁰ FCO officials quoted in Worrall, *Statebuilding and Counterinsurgency in Oman* p 69.

⁹³¹ For an edited volume that comprehensively covers the revised interpretation see Hughes (Ed), *British Ways of Counter-Insurgency*.

be established and civil development at least begun.⁹³² This type of campaign combines military and civilian activity to achieve success for the government.

In counter-insurgency, measures are deliberately conceived to ensure the population has no choice but to comply, achieving success for the government. This is not simply violence or coercion for its own sake but the application of the French military writer, David Galula's, argument that "it is not enough for the government to set political goals...; politics becomes an active instrument of operation..., every military move has to be weighed with regard to its political effects".⁹³³ In this manner the correct characterisation of a conflict would balance the ends, ways and means formula correctly. If the character of a conflict was misunderstood, as it had been in South Arabia then there was little that a piecemeal political warfare strategy could achieve. The phrase 'hearts and minds' may have come to dominate counter-insurgency theory but in Aden the placation of the local population, provision of security and granting more political rights was certainly absent.⁹³⁴ The absence of such a policy meant that there was no comprehensive political warfare strategy to challenge all the adversary groups, encourage support for the Federation from fence sitters and ultimately defeat insurgents.⁹³⁵ Instead, British political warfare focused on challenging Nasser inspired Arab nationalism in the information space without offering an alternative.

The limited attempts to persuade local inhabitants of South Arabia that they were better off with Britain demonstrates a weakness in appreciating the peculiar character of a conflict. The political warfare campaign was dogmatic in its focus on Egyptian intervention, painting it and President Nasser as the adversary. Whilst this approach could be viewed as an attempt to gain public support, it failed to effectively counter the more persuasive broadcasting delivered by Egyptian political warfare in support of the insurgents.⁹³⁶ These broadcasts were well aligned to the target audience and had an emotional attachment for the listener. This was the direct opposite of the attempts to project the Federation, which

⁹³² For a modern definition of stabilisation see UK MOD, *Shaping a Stable World: The Military Contribution* (Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2016) p 28.

⁹³³ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006) p 5.

⁹³⁴ Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2011) p 7.

⁹³⁵ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency in the Post Imperial Era* p 67.

⁹³⁶ Martin Jerrett "Operation Salah al-Din: The Egyptian Intelligence Service and its Role in the Clandestine War against Britain in South Yemen" in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (Eds) *Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020) p 128.

failed to convince audiences as it was a new and different idea to the traditional societal structures of the area.⁹³⁷ The information means employed in South Arabia failed to recognise that local considerations and a desire for change in the system of government were actually the primary factor behind growing support for the insurgents.⁹³⁸ The means therefore fell short of providing a way to coerce the population into supporting the Federation and achieve Britain's objective.

The emphasis on coercion in the now orthodox view of British counter-insurgency needs tempering by interpretations that have studied how phases during a campaign affect the application of force.⁹³⁹ Such an interpretation has led to the conclusion that although coercion was an element of counter-insurgency, so was persuasion and there was a balance between the two during different phases of a campaign.⁹⁴⁰ The argument around balancing coercion, persuasion and control is compelling as it helps to explain how political warfare could support campaign success. In Oman population control was critical to success during some phases of the Dhofar campaign through the use of fortified lines allowing the allies (Oman, Britain, Iran and Jordan) to assert control of the ground, physically separating the locals from the insurgents. These conventional military operations, gaining control of the people in an area of government choosing, initially took precedence over other activities.⁹⁴¹ When civil development was possible in Oman, its effects could be showcased through political warfare activities as a way to persuade the local population of the benefits of Government rule. Coercion and persuasion were therefore not mutually exclusive. The means of control through physical separate in the more inaccessible reaches of South Arabia such as the Radfan involved the use of military aircraft to attack animal herds and agricultural infrastructure in order to force the local population to leave the area.⁹⁴² This was the traditional approach to population control and dated from the 1920s. However, when exposed by the media spotlight in the 1960s, this reflected badly on a supposedly benign British strategy and ultimately this course of action was not pursued further.⁹⁴³ The British Information Commissioner in Aden, Tony Ashworth, may have had significant financial and publication control over the local media but appears to have failed to comprehend the changed character of the global media

⁹³⁷ TNA, CO 1027/392 Local Intelligence Committee Report, 6 September 1962.

⁹³⁸ Mawby, "The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism" p 189.

⁹³⁹ Hack, "Everyone Lived in Fear" p 673.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid p 690.

⁹⁴¹ Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies* p 344 and Hughes, "Demythologising Dhofar" p 453-454.

⁹⁴² French, "Nasty Not Nice" p 752.

⁹⁴³ Walker, *Aden Insurgency* p 7 and Clare Hollingworth, "Britain try to Starve out Tribesmen" *The Guardian*, 16 May 1964.

environment. This shows a potential weakness in political warfare, where controlling “the establishment of internal security, political stability and economic viability” were necessary acts in successfully countering an insurgency.⁹⁴⁴ Without such control the successful execution of a campaign was unlikely.

The major consideration for succeeding in counter-insurgency for Britain in the post war period was so that it could establish successor regimes that would maintain its influence and prevent Marxist or other disruptive ideologies (such as nationalism) from gaining ground.⁹⁴⁵ To achieve this without a major deployment of conventional military power, a highly attractive strategy was to combine local military activity to defeat the insurgents, with incentives to coerce the local population to side with the British, therein achieving control of the situation. An element of control was a prerequisite but so was an understanding of the context to correctly use such control. A failure to fully comprehend the context to a particular conflict would jeopardise such an alignment of military means to other activities.⁹⁴⁶ In this, Clausewitz is relevant as he wrote that the first decision in a conflict is to ascertain what sort of war is being fought.⁹⁴⁷ No two conflicts will have the same context and the inability to correctly appreciate the peculiar character of a conflict situation almost certainly affects its outcome.⁹⁴⁸ This characterisation provides the background and setting to events: why did the insurgency arise, what social groups were likely to support the insurgency and which others might be incentivised to remain loyal or collaborate? Identifying the character of the conflict was vital if political warfare was to be successfully employed through targeted (rather than persistent or worse indiscriminate) military action and propaganda and psychological operations that resonated with the intended audience.⁹⁴⁹ In Oman the specific circumstances of the conflict were appreciated and helped to shape the delivery of political warfare. The inability to grasp the character of the conflict in Aden resulted in failure but it also demonstrates a limitation of political warfare. As a way of achieving Britain’s objectives political warfare was reliant on the British government correctly characterising conflicts, otherwise the specific methods and tools could not be applied most effectively.

⁹⁴⁴ Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy* p 232.

⁹⁴⁵ Even in 1967 when the security situation in South Arabia was dire, British officials planned on handing over power to a friendly successor regime to try and increase the likelihood of future influence. Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies* p 119.

⁹⁴⁶ Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth* p 148.

⁹⁴⁷ Rob Johnson, *True to Their Salt: Indigenous Personnel in Western Armed Forces* (London: Hurst, 2017) p 6.

⁹⁴⁸ Simpson, *War From the Ground Up* p 103.

⁹⁴⁹ Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth* p 148.

Britain's Use of Political Warfare

This thesis argued that the retreat from Aden and the intensification of the conflict in Dhofar were as a result of muddled Government policy making, which culminated during the Labour Government of 1964-7. The research undertaken for this thesis shows that Government political choices were important but the results of the campaigns, nor the failure or success of political warfare, were not determined by these alone. The reasoning behind Government decision making was complex, hence why the campaign chapters in this thesis set out the context before examining the fresh detail of political warfare. Through this the effects of events in totality could be assessed. This analysis shows that the framing of Government decisions in the context of the Cold War prevented opportunities to change the way Britain achieved its national interests during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Had a change to the deployment of troops been taken sooner than the late 1960s then political warfare could have been more effective in shaping the views of local people. Instead, by continuing to believe that access to oil could only be guaranteed through large garrisons in the Middle East, Britain presented Arab nationalists with a ready-made aggressor narrative. That policy was slow to change was as a result of the machinery of government that did not support decisive decision making and proved a barrier to cross government activities such as political warfare. The most significant limitation of political warfare was the inability to implement a system for measuring the effectiveness of activity. Time and again activities were carried out through a range of attributable and unattributable means, the results of which were unknown. With hindsight, this places limits on the usefulness of political warfare as a strategy to support campaigns such as those in Southern Arabia, when the impact of activities was not measured and the results not determined.

The course of events studied through this thesis show an interplay between the role of institutions and the impact of individual actions. This thesis has been able to analyse the role of institutions through the IRD and DFP and develop the historical understanding of these organisations' activities making use of new material. Whilst bureaucratic structures certainly had an effect on political warfare individual figures stand out too. New sources have helped to illuminate individuals' actions regarding political warfare in Southern Arabia. Tony Ashworth is an obvious example and is relatively well known. His role in IRD straddled both campaigns, where he focused on developing unattributable political

warfare. His persistence in pursuing the resettlement of a member of Aden Radio who was likely to be threatened by the new regime in 1967 shows a different side to his character.⁹⁵⁰

The military officers deployed by the DFP also stand out and are less well known than their IRD colleagues. They attempted to make the best of projects under the community relations scheme and to build confidence in the Federal Government in South Arabia. This could be seen as hypocritical given that the aim of such projects was to provide evidence to the population of British goodwill but official papers record regret that these efforts failed to provide a better standard of living for local people.⁹⁵¹ John Ward played a significant role in the conduct of political warfare in Oman and his activities deserve more recognition than they have previously received. In both South Arabia and Oman, the work of a small number of individuals had a greater impact through political warfare than has sometimes been recognised. Individuals mattered because Britain was able to maintain a degree of influence after it withdrew and disbanded its political warfare organisations through those who stayed on as contractors to successor governments.

IRD was disbanded in 1977 reportedly because it was time to “end the grey area, which for far too long escaped proper scrutiny, falling neither in the open area of diplomacy nor in the closed area of spying”.⁹⁵² The controversial use of black or unattributable propaganda and other covert techniques that have been revealed through IRD’s detailed files help to explain that statement. There are likely to have been other factors at play too. By 1977 the conflict in Oman was effectively over and overtly Britain had withdrawn from the Gulf. It has been suggested that as Britain’s overseas position “contracted” the opportunities for political warfare were reduced.⁹⁵³ The closure of IRD appears to support this assertion as the organisation was not simply an anomaly but its closure would actually provide the opportunity to save money, as a 1980 report by the FCO confirmed.⁹⁵⁴

That cost saving was a factor in reducing Britain’s political warfare capabilities in the late 1970s is compelling. Using the value for money argument however would suggest that the

⁹⁵⁰ See chapter 3 of this thesis. TNA, FCO 168/2545 Ashworth to IRD, 16 April 1967.

⁹⁵¹ The Military Intelligence Museum, DFP 234/1 Psychological Operations in South Arabia – January 1965 to September 1967, 5 March 1968.

⁹⁵² David Owen, *Time to Declare* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991) p 348.

⁹⁵³ Lucas, ““A Bright Shining Mecca”” p 366.

⁹⁵⁴ Report referenced in Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny* (endnote 54) p 222, TNA, PREM 19/238 The Management of East West Relations, 2 May 1980.

capability should have been dismantled much earlier. On such an objective basis, political warfare repeatedly failed to demonstrate how effective its operations were through any attempt at measurement. During the Falkland's conflict in 1982 the MOD attempted to use psychological operations "as a non-violent weapon...to support military operations...[which] could well result in saving lives".⁹⁵⁵ This approach of attempting to use methods of political warfare as a way to persuade a target audience to change their behaviour or attitude mirrored previous operations in Oman. Once again however "no firm information [was] received concerning the impact [of the psychological operations]...on the target".⁹⁵⁶ The consistent inability to quantify the effect of political warfare means that assessing its overall utility is difficult for the historian but the release of official papers offers opportunities for further research.

Neither the closure of the DFP in 1968 nor the IRD in 1977 halted Britain's use of political warfare because it continued, at a much reduced level, through the Special Producer Unit (SPU). This was part of the FCO's Overseas Information Department (OID), both of which included former members of IRD.⁹⁵⁷ Previously it was thought that "the covert capability of IRD was removed and incorporated into M16".⁹⁵⁸ Files now in The National Archives show that this was not completely accurate, with the SPU retaining "some of the residuary capabilities of the wartime PWE".⁹⁵⁹ The continuation of similar activities to IRD can be seen in the SPU's annual report for 1978. This recorded that although it had a "modest establishment of 13 officers" the methods it employed included, "Covert Press outlets", Controlled outlets and Covert ("Grey" and "Black") Operations".⁹⁶⁰ The level of cooperation with the security and intelligence agencies is difficult to pinpoint but security and indeed secrecy appear to have been pressing concerns. A thorough review was undertaken when a paper listing the SPU members was mistakenly sent to FCO posts in July 1977.⁹⁶¹

Cooperation between the FCO and the MOD also continued after the closure of IRD. For example, the military officers responsible for psychological operations training (through the

⁹⁵⁵ TNA, DEFE 24/2254, Report on Psy Ops in Op Corporate, undated.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁷ For example, the head of the OID in 1978 was Peter Joy. He had been the Regional Information Officer in Beirut in the 1970s. TNA, FCO 168/5837 Joy to Ferguson, 3 April 1978.

⁹⁵⁸ Lashmar and Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War* p 171 and Paul Lashmar, *Spies, Spin and the Fourth Estate: British Intelligence and the Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) p 118.

⁹⁵⁹ TNA, FCO 168/5837 Proposed TV Programme on PWE Propaganda Activities, 30 March 1978

⁹⁶⁰ TNA, FCO 168/5964 Annual Report: 1978 p 1, undated.

⁹⁶¹ TNA, FCO 168/5773 Possible Security Breach, 7 July 1977.

Joint Warfare Wing of the National Defence College), helped to arrange a visit with the OI in 1979 and the MOD continued to published manuals on its support to “Information Activities”.⁹⁶² Similarly, the FCO continued to want to understand the use of propaganda by others as can be seen by a departmental brief from 1989 on Soviet propaganda organisations.⁹⁶³ The closure of Britain’s political warfare organisations did not see an end to interest in the subject within Government. Further research will be required to uncover the revised structures and practices that were implemented and used in other campaigns during the 1980s and 90s. The changes to the way that Britain engaged in the Middle East during the Oman conflict show a continued wish to hold a degree of influence but a realisation that the ways to achieve this needed to change. The closure of IRD was therefore part of a process that had begun in the late 1960s, which aimed to reduce the visibility of Britain’s activities to gain influence.

British political warfare in the 1960s and 70s attempted to gain and maintain influence as a way to enable British interests to be achieved. The retention of Aden as a military base, replacing the Suez one, was viewed as a sign of Britain’s continued power and influence in the Middle East. By viewing the base in this way it became much harder to consider other options without them being seen as a sign of decline. At the heart of why political warfare failed to support the campaign in South Arabia is the mismatch of agency and control. The consideration of national interest made the base important and led to the belief that Britain had the agency to “create the necessary political conditions that...[would] allow it to achieve direct or indirect control of that society”.⁹⁶⁴ The wish to not repeat the muddled retreat from South Arabia saw a much more effective decision-making apparatus during the Oman campaign as officials and politicians came together. Both were convinced not to repeat the mistakes from South Arabia but Edward Heath’s well-informed decision to pursue a deliberately hidden campaign was particularly important.

The key to British political warfare being successful is best illustrated by understanding the character of the campaign in Oman. Like any conflict its character was dictated by the context of the time it was fought and the particular circumstances. To suggest that the successful campaign could be repeated would be a mistake because any repetition would

⁹⁶² TNA, FCO 168/8040 Byran to Pell, 2 November 1979 and UK MOD, Manual of Joint Warfare Volume VII, Military Involvement in Information Activities (Public Relations, Community Relations and Psychological Operations) Part 2 Techniques and Procedures (London: Ministry of Defence, 1982).

⁹⁶³ TNA, FO 973/578 Soviet Propaganda Organisations: A Survey, April 1989.

⁹⁶⁴ Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy* p 17.

be based on having similar conditions present, which is unlikely. The campaign strategy in Dhofar made significant use of conventional military operations, at a time when political warfare activities could covertly support this. To be successful these activities needed synchronisation which took far longer to achieve than has previously been considered. Britain benefitted through the timing of the campaign as it was conducted when particular circumstance meant that Dhofar and Oman more generally were still remote places on the globe in 1970. This prevented the media spotlight falling on Oman in the way that it did on South Arabia. The presence of British military support was hidden in a way that would be far more difficult in the twenty first century. Whilst political warfare as a supporting strategy was successful in Oman, its failure in South Arabia shows that its utility in all conflicts should not be presumed.

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AIR 20 Air Historical Branch.

CAB 21 Cabinet Office Registered Files.

CAB 30 Cabinet Secretary's Miscellaneous Papers.

CAB 81 War Cabinet and Sub Committees.

CAB 101 War Cabinet and Cabinet Office: Historical Section.

CAB 121 Special Secret Information Centre Registered Files.

CAB 129 Memorandum.

CAB 130 Miscellaneous Committee Files.

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CO 1055 Aden Department, Registry Files.
DEFE 4 Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes.
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FO 1059 Information Research Department, Periodicals.
FO 1093 Permanent Under-Secretary's Department.
FO 1110 Information Research Department, General Correspondence.
FCO 8 Arabian and Middle East Departments.
FCO 46 Defence Department.
FCO 168 Information Research Department, Registry Files.
FCO 174 Information Research Department, Registry Files.
KV 4 The Security Service Policy Files.
INF 4 Ministry of Information.
PREM 11 Prime Minister's Office, 1951-64.
PREM 13 Prime Minister's Office, 1964-70.
PREM 15 Prime Minister's Office, 1970-74.
PREM 16 Prime Minister's Office, 1974-79.
T 234 Home and Overseas Planning Staff Division.

T 236 Overseas Finance Division.

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