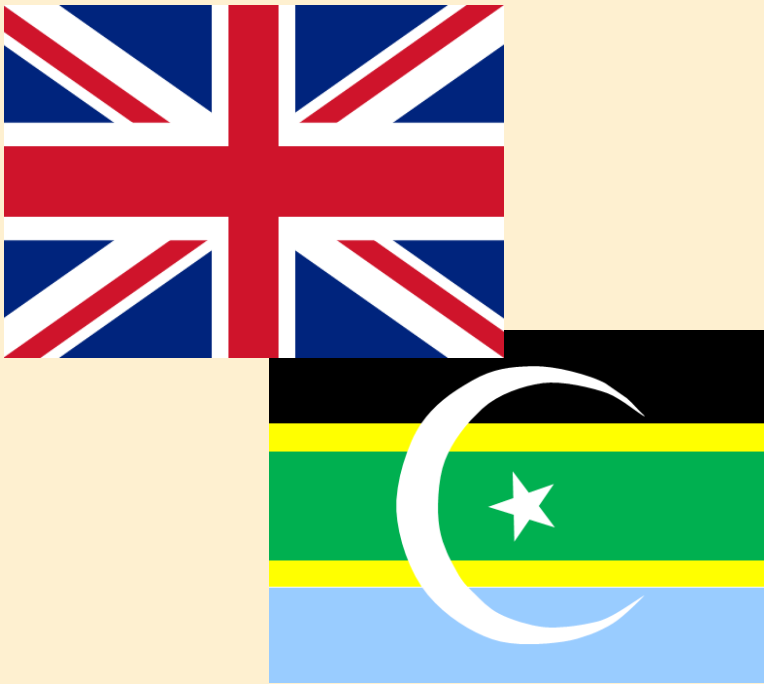


Art of War Papers

An 'Exit Strategy' Not a Winning Strategy?

**Intelligence Lessons Learned From the
British 'Emergency' in South Arabia, 1963–67**



Stephen Andrew Campbell
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Winning Strategy? Intelligence
Lessons Learned From The
British 'Emergency' In South
Arabia, 1963-67**

**A thesis presented to the Faculty of the
US Army Command and General Staff College**

**Master of Military Art and Science
Art of War**

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Abstract

An ‘Exit Strategy’ Not A Winning Strategy? Intelligence Lessons Learned From The British ‘Emergency’ In South Arabia, 1963-67

by Major Stephen Andrew Campbell

The British Army is often praised for a particular skill in small wars or counter-insurgencies (COIN). Some attribute this to the special challenge of maintaining order across a global empire with a relatively small force; others cite the intellectual inheritance of great British military theorists and an inherent flexibility present within a small army used to adaptation. Recent scholarship has challenged this view, suggesting that the UK’s record of success in COIN is inconsistent and ignores many failures. When thinking about the British record, and the validity of ‘British ideas’ on how best to fight and win at COIN, it is useful to examine a less well-known conflict—the war in South Arabia (better known as the Aden Emergency). Although the war was part of the decolonization of the British Empire in the 1960s, the South Arabian conflict has much in common with recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan: challenging terrain and people; intricate local politics; a de facto nation-building task; an externally-sponsored insurgency with safe havens in a neighboring state; finally, an unexpected major change in strategy—in this case to unilateral withdrawal (an ‘exit’ strategy). This thesis examines the relationship between strategy, operational art and intelligence in the context of the British government’s controversial decision in February 1966 to reverse its course by adopting an exit strategy with a public timeline. One of the unintended consequences of this decision was to cripple the ability of the withdrawing military to collect intelligence from the local populace. As a result of the shift in strategy, UK forces were more vulnerable and the British government less able to achieve the limited objectives of its new policy and strategy. Consequently, British forces became increasingly blind and faced greater violence from

the insurgents with their intelligence organization simply overwhelmed. British forces were of little use with the critical strategic task of helping the British government identify the dominant local factions with whom to negotiate. This thesis focuses on the performance of the UK's intelligence apparatus—particularly the critical importance of creating an adaptable intelligence organization and how it was affected by the change of strategy. It also explores the extent to which the British military identified and addressed its experiences in South Arabia and incorporated the lessons of the conflict into its institutions. Analysis of the South Arabia campaign highlights the importance of adaptation and prioritizing intelligence as a method of regaining the initiative from the enemy. It also illustrates the importance of understanding the consequences of fundamental changes in policy—particularly for intelligence—if the military is expected to succeed at executing an 'exit' strategy. Finally, the value of intellectual honesty, moral courage and critical self-reflection is advocated lest we choose to ignore valuable insights and lessons gained in the hardest way.

Objectives of the Art of War Scholars Program

The Art of War Scholars Program is a laboratory for critical thinking. It offers a select group of students a range of accelerated, academically rigorous graduate level courses that promote analysis, stimulate the desire for life-long learning, and reinforce academic research skills. Art of War graduates will not be satisfied with facile arguments; they understand the complexities inherent in almost any endeavor and develop the tools and fortitude to confront such complexities, analyze challenges, and independently seek nuanced solutions in the face of those who would opt for cruder alternatives. Through the pursuit of these outcomes, the Art of War Scholars Program seeks to improve and deepen professional military education.

The Art of War Program places contemporary operations (such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan) in a historical framework by examining earlier military campaigns. Case studies and readings have been selected to show the consistent level of complexity posed by military campaigns throughout the modern era. Coursework emphasizes the importance of understanding previous engagements in order to formulate policy and doctrinal response to current and future campaigns.

One unintended consequence of military history education is the phenomenon of commanders and policy makers “cherry picking” history—that is, pointing to isolated examples from past campaigns to bolster a particular position in a debate, without a comprehensive understanding of the context in which such incidents occurred. This trend of oversimplification leaves many historians wary of introducing these topics into broader, more general discussion. The Art of War program seeks to avoid this pitfall by a thorough examination of context. As one former student stated: “The insights gained have left me with more questions than answers but have increased my ability to understand greater complexities of war rather than the rhetorical narrative that accompanies cursory study of any topic.”

Professor Michael Howard, writing “The Use and Abuse of Military History” in 1961, proposed a framework for educating military officers in the art of war that remains unmatched in its

clarity, simplicity, and totality. The Art of War program endeavors to model his plan:

Three general rules of study must therefore be borne in mind by the officer who studies military history as a guide to his profession and who wishes to avoid pitfalls. First, he must study in *width*. He must observe the way in which warfare has developed over a long historical period. Only by seeing what does change can one deduce what does not; and as much as can be learnt from the great discontinuities of military history as from the apparent similarities of the techniques employed by the great captains through the ages....Next he must study in *depth*. He should take a single campaign and explore it thoroughly, not simply from official histories, but from memoirs, letters, diaries...until the tidy outlines dissolve and he catches a glimpse of the confusion and horror of real experience...and, lastly, he must study in *context*. Campaigns and battles are not like games of chess or football matches, conducted in total detachment from their environment according to strictly defined rules. Wars are not tactical exercises writ large. They are... conflicts of societies, and they can be fully understood only if one understands the nature of the society fighting them. The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield, in political, social, and economic factors which explain why armies are constituted as they are, and why their leaders conduct them in the way they do....

It must not be forgotten that the true use of history, military or civil...is not to make men clever for the next time; it is to make them wise forever.

Gordon B. Davis, Jr.
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Acronyms and Terms

Aden. The colony under British sovereignty; also known as Aden State.

Aden Trades Union Council (ATUC). The organisation in Aden responsible for representing the labour force; sponsored by Egypt, ATUC became heavily politicised, anti-British and supported violence and protests during the Emergency.

British Security Service (BSS). More commonly known as MI5, BSS's primary role is in defence of security of the UK mainland. There were links to the colonies through Special Branch.

Colonial Office. The civil service organisation within the UK government responsible for administration, government and order within the colonies. They provided the administrative and policing manpower for the colonies and the UK's political leadership in South Arabia.

Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP). The territorial area of various Sheikdoms, Sultanates and tribal territories to the east of Aden that bordered Saudi Arabia and Oman with which the British Crown had treaties but did not exercise direct administrative or military control. The EAP was asked to join the FSA but declined.

Federation Of South Arabia (FSA). The would-be state that by 1963 comprised Aden and the Western Aden Protectorate; intended by the UK and their local allies to gain independence in 1968, retain a British military base and have security treaties with the UK.

Foreign Office. The civil service organisation within the UK government responsible for diplomacy. In this period it was separate from the Colonial Office. Critically, within the context of the Emergency, the Foreign Office was the lead department for interaction with Egypt and Yemen.

Front For The Liberation Of South Yemen (FLOSY). The Egyptian-sponsored anti-British insurgent organisation within Aden. FLOSY was an attempt to unify the NLF and the Aden trades union movement. The NLF broke away and ultimately prevailed over FLOSY.

High Commissioner. Part of the Colonial Office, the High Commissioner was the highest ranking civilian and effectively the UK's authority in country.

Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). The JIC was the central committee within the UK responsible for intelligence for senior political and military leaders.

Local Intelligence Committee (LIC). The LIC was the JIC's subordinate organisation in Aden responsible for intelligence assessments in South Arabia.

Middle East Command (MEC). The UK's tri-service military organisation commanded by a 3-star officer responsible for the UK presence in the entire Middle East. Under the various British Defence White Papers from 1953-64 it was intended to provide a military response to a global war against the USSR in the event of a global war. After the loss of friendly territory in Israel and Egypt in the 1950s the UK decided on Aden as the most appropriate location for MEC.

Middle East Land Forces (MELF). The land component within MEC. From July 1965 onwards the General Officer Commanding MELF was also responsible for the security aspects of the Emergency.

National Liberation Front (NLF). The insurgent group in South Arabia that ultimately prevailed over the UK, Federation of South Arabia and FLOSY. They too were sponsored by the Egyptian Intelligence Services but generated a political narrative of being an indigenous, "nationalist" resistance.

Political Agent or Advisor. The UK's advisor to local tribal leaders in the EAP and WAP. A civil servant from the Colonial Office, the Political Agent/Advisor worked alone with little or no protection other than the terms of the original treaty agreed with the local tribal leader.

Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). More commonly known as MI6, the primary role for SIS in the context of the Aden Emergency was counter-espionage and counter-intelligence against the Egyptian Intelligence Services supporting the NLF and FLOSY. SIS was also active within Republican Yemen.

Special Branch (SB). Part of the UK police force structure in the UK mainland and in the colonies, Special Branch was responsible for counter-terrorism, counter-subversion, political intelligence and support to the national intelligence agencies as requested. In the colonies the tradition was to recruit members of the local population as well as British citizens. The combination of local knowledge and British expertise was often very effective; Aden Special Branch was the first organisation targeted by the NLF in their terrorist campaign.

Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). The territorial area of various tribal territories surrounding Aden. The British Crown did not exercise direct administrative or military control. The WAP combined to form the Federation of South Arabia in 1962.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The British Defeat in ‘South Arabia’

The British Army has excelled in small-unit, anti-guerrilla warfare as they did in other aspects of counterinsurgency. History had given them an army that was relatively small and decentralized and, therefore, ideally suited to such warfare.¹

—Thomas R. Mockaitis

Look at us, we’re on the street in our soft caps and everyone loves us.²

—David Kilcullen

Defeat is a difficult topic for the military to discuss in any other context than the inflicting it on the enemy. A casual glance at the military history best-seller list illustrates that aside from first-hand heroic accounts of war and infamous assassinations, the two most popular topics are great victories and terrible disasters.³ The ‘great blunders’ cottage industry tends to stick to safe topics that focus on well-known, conventional wars—usually second guessing of Napoleon or Hitler—rather than analyse more ambiguous, protracted conflicts. For every ‘Fiasco’ there is an ‘Overlord,’ ‘Stalingrad,’ ‘Barbarossa,’ or ‘Berlin.’ Cold, rational analysis of defeats in counter-insurgency (COIN) conflicts is infrequent—perhaps an indicator of the less clear-cut outcome in that kind of warfare. It may also be a sign of the difficulties professional institutions experience in admitting mistakes and learning from their experiences in COIN.

The British defeat in the would-be ‘Federation of South Arabia’ in the period 1963-67 is just such a difficult, protracted COIN conflict. It sits as a defeat between much more successful campaigns in Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya and Oman yet it receives comparatively little attention. Over the past thirty-five years it has been in and out of the British Army’s professional military education (PME) curriculum and COIN doctrine. During the recent difficult experience in Iraq, the war in Aden was brought back in.⁴

Withdrawing the campaign as a core component of PME in the preceding decades was a serious error—particularly as the Malayan Emergency was retained as the primary case study. Excluding Aden while retaining Malaya, results in a one-dimensional, narrow appreciation of COIN and the different operational approaches taken by the British mili-

tary. Analysis of the South Arabia conflict can broaden the understanding of the variety and nuances contained within the many approaches the British actually employed in COIN—particularly the misleading clichés ‘hearts and minds’, ‘minimal force’ and intelligence.⁵ It also offers specific experiences and lessons relevant to the contemporary UK and US militaries—especially in the field of intelligence in a hostile environment.

The war in South Arabia was fought by a western force with local allies against committed Arab insurgents benefiting from strong external support—Nasser’s Egypt, Republican Yemen and the Soviet Union.⁶ It contains many themes and lessons pertinent to contemporary US and UK forces. From a strategic and operational perspective perhaps the most significant lesson is the impact of imposing a public timeline for withdrawal, in turn driven by a fundamental change in national policy, and the consequent negative impact that had on the ability of the military to achieve even limited objectives. This shift from a winning strategy to an ‘exit strategy’, and the negative effect that had on the ability of British forces to gather and use intelligence, is the focus of this thesis.⁷

Thesis Summary and Structure

This thesis assesses the intelligence component of the UK’s counter-insurgency campaign in South Arabia - particularly the role of the military, especially the army, within the overall British intelligence organization. Specific areas examined are the adequacy of the intelligence organization at the inception of the campaign; its ability to identify its own weaknesses, learn and adapt; and, the impact on the effectiveness of intelligence of the UK government’s complete reversal of national policy in 1966. It concludes with an analysis of the extent the specialist intelligence organization within the British Army, the Intelligence Corps, attempted to recognise and address any lessons.

An underlying idea that supports this thesis is the central importance of maximising intelligence to achieve success in COIN. This concept has broad support among military theorists and in US and UK doctrine.⁸ In short, it argues that developing an effective intelligence organization is the very foundation for any successful COIN campaign. Without intelligence, any advantages the counter-insurgent has in firepower, training, technology and weaponry will not be efficient and are unlikely to even be effective. There is not the space in this thesis to explore this supporting idea in any greater depth but it will provide the reader with a case study of how the failure to adapt and develop an effective intelligence organization made a major contribution to defeat.

The analysis and conclusions in this document may make uncomfortable reading from a British perspective—particularly for a would-be learning organization. The civilian and military forces in South Arabia lost the initiative to the insurgents and struggled to recover. The existing intelligence organization in Aden was overwhelmed by a very effective urban terrorist campaign; in the Protectorates British forces were similarly blind to the insurgent network and were isolated from potential tribal support. The British military and civilian government machinery did recognise the need to change and adapt but were very slow to do so. By the time new personnel arrived in South Arabia a complete reversal of national policy was being pursued—the exit strategy. From then on intelligence delivered ever diminishing returns. The local populace would not side with a departing power or its preferred option for independent government. When British forces finally withdrew in November 1967 their intelligence organization was broadly ineffective yet there is no sign that the Intelligence Corps made any attempt to formally any identify lessons.⁹

The thesis has five parts. Chapter one provides the introduction explaining the thesis, key definitions, and a brief narrative of the overall campaign. This provides the necessary historical context for subsequent detailed analysis of the intelligence organization and its performance in the conflict.

Chapter two outlines and analyses the political and military structures which the intelligence organization supported. It also provides a brief explanation of the key theories and models that underpin intelligence within the British Army—particularly the eight core principles of intelligence. The latter are used as criteria to assess intelligence performance in the conflict—particularly ‘centralized control’ and ‘exploitation’ as both were recognised by contemporaries as weaknesses that required adaptation and change.

Chapter three focuses on a key aspect of intelligence—the application of the principle ‘centralised control’ and how well this was done within the South Arabian campaign. Within intelligence ‘centralised control’ is not as glamorous as covert collection or exploitation. However, much like the critical importance of designing clear command and control structures for operations at the start of the campaign it provides either a sound framework or frustrates unity of effort and clarity of responsibility.

Chapter four explores the contentious issue of intelligence exploitation—particularly the interrogation of terrorist suspects to gain intelligence without undermining the legitimacy of the counter-insurgent and their local allies. This includes balancing the need for actionable intelligence with UK legal and policy constraints plus scrutiny from international actors

such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Chapter five encompasses all of the previous themes and assesses the enduring relevance of the South Arabian campaign by comparing the lessons to recent UK and US experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. It concludes with a brief examination of the degree to which the British Army, particularly the Intelligence Corps, was open to institutional learning from its experience and what this means about forming “learning organizations” within contemporary militaries. Before examining the political and military structures supported by the UK intelligence organization, it is necessary to provide the appropriate context with key definitions and a brief narrative of the conflict in South Arabia.

Definitions and Terminology

The British campaign in ‘South Arabia’ does not have an agreed lexicon for some of the most basic entities in the conflict. Even the war itself is referred to by many different, confusing names—the Aden ‘Emergency’, the ‘savage war in South Arabia’, the Radfan campaign etc.¹⁰ A basic problem in achieving consensus on what to call the campaign, and the various actors within it, is the demise of the British-sponsored state the “Federation of South Arabia” and its successor the “Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Yemen.” The second obstacle is the disparate political geography of ‘South Arabia’, and the wider Arabian Peninsula, in the 1960s defies easy description and categorisation. For example, in the Western Aden Protectorate alone there were nine Sultanates, six Sheikdoms, two Emirates and one State.¹¹ Those factors frustrate universally agreed terminology and thereby risk obscuring important ideas through terms that over-simplify the environment.

This thesis does not refer to the conflict as the ‘Aden Emergency’, the ‘Radfan Campaign’ or any of the other terms popularly used as shorthand for the conflict. Although it is no doubt easier to refer to the conflict as taking place in “Aden” or even just as “Yemen,” that lack of precision obscures the relationship between the rural guerrilla war, the urban insurgency and the external support network in Republican Yemen and Egypt. It overlooks the complexity of the environment and makes it more difficult to explain the interplay between the different areas that affected the British strategy and ability to develop an effective intelligence network.

There are three key political entities that are referred to: first, the Aden Colony or Aden State; this is the territory for which the British Crown had assumed sovereignty and directly governed from 26 Sep 1965 when the local populace effectively sided with the insurgency.¹² Second,

the Western and Eastern Aden Protectorates containing the various sultanates, shiekhdoms and dolas of the traditional rural tribal leaders such as the Sutlans of Lahej, Yala (including Abyan), Beihan, the Hawdramawt. Third, the would-be independent state the “Federation of South Arabia”, sponsored by the British, but not controlled by them, comprising their local allies in Aden and the Western Aden Protectorate. Consequently, the overall conflict is referred to as “the South Arabia Campaign.”

An event described as occurring in ‘Aden’—or in ‘the Protectorates’—denotes something that happened in those specific areas; it is not short-hand for the entire campaign. This approach enables differentiation between the insurgency in urban and rural areas—a useful distinction as the British struggled to cope with the very different challenges of armed subversion in both domains. However, it is essential that an overall name exist for the entire conflict as there was a coherent political and violent campaign that spanned both types of terrain—an insurgency—with external state sponsorship.

The term ‘armed subversion’, and the rural-urban differences, brings out the issue of even defining the conflict in South Arabia as a ‘counter-insurgency’ conflict at all. Exploring the nature of what insurgency is would be an interesting digression but is not strictly necessary here. However, before exploring the historical narrative of the conflict it is worth exploring this fundamental conceptual issue slightly further. When examining what kind of war was being conducted between the British and their adversaries two points emerge: first, the testimony of British officers in the conflict shows a clear understanding of the complexity of the threat they faced—terrorism and subversion sponsored by Egypt—but they did not use the specific term ‘counter-insurgency’.¹³ Second, by modern US and UK doctrine the South Arabia Campaign clearly does meet the definition insurgency and therefore is a COIN conflict.¹⁴ A brief narrative history of the conflict will illustrate why confusion exists, the extent of the challenge facing British forces and how this affected intelligence collection and analysis.

History: the UK and ‘the Savage War in South Arabia’

The conflict in South Arabia lasted four years: from the declaration of the ‘Emergency’ in Aden in December 1963 to the withdrawal by all British military forces in November 1967 and the abandonment of all previous defence treaties with the local rulers in the Protectorates. Any appraisal of the war should include the preceding decade of armed, but low-intensity, conflict against Yemeni-sponsored subversion in the Pro-

tectorates, anti-British trade unionism in Aden and the British-sponsored insurgency against Republican Yemen from 1962 onwards.¹⁵

To analyse the performance of the intelligence organization there are six areas to explain: one, the colonial history of the UK's role in South Arabia; two, the development of the nascent FSA as an entity and would-be government; three, the composition and motivations of the insurgency; four, the states providing external support to the insurgents; five, the Cold War context of the UK's regional position; six, a brief narrative of the conflict itself. Finally, the chapter concludes by exploring the validity of the idea that an improved British intelligence capability could even have made a difference to the outcome through a brief analysis of the historical narrative.

Colonial Origins: Aden the accidental colony?

Prior to British colonisation, 'Aden' was a small Arab settlement on the tip of the Arabian Peninsula close to the sea lanes linking West Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian sub-continent. Its political and economic relationship with the outside world was strongly affected by this position. Its geography linked it to Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean; while the surrounding mountainous and arid desert interior made it difficult to develop and govern—especially for an outside force. In 1839 British forces from Bombay established a small naval post and colony in Aden to assist with the empire in India. The Ottoman Empire had attempted to incorporate Yemen into its domain but found it too difficult to justify the cost in blood and treasure. After the First World War saw the end of the Ottoman hegemony over the interior, the British tentatively increased their influence beyond Aden but only as a means to protect the colony.¹⁶

By 1945, the UK had established a relatively stable political equilibrium on the Arabian Peninsula. Aden was a prosperous British-administered port city with a diverse populace of Adenis, Indian, Malay and Yemeni immigrants. The interior was relatively undeveloped tribal areas ruled by traditional leaders tied to the UK through bilateral security treaties. There was constant competition for influence amongst those tribal leaders from the Imam's regime in Yemen. However, there was no sign that the latter was able to fundamentally undermine the British position or that British rule in Aden itself was in imminent danger of ending.¹⁷

For the British, Aden presented a minor challenge within their overall global empire albeit with some peculiar local characteristics. Aden and the surrounding rural territories ruled by tribal leaders and were never a single nation-state, or unified political entity, comparable to the many princely states incorporated by the British into Imperial India. Aside from being

Britain's only Arab colony, the settlement in Aden was something of an anomaly in terms of the character of British rule. Aden's importance was primarily based on the British position in India; it was ruled from Bombay before the British Colonial Office assumed responsibility for government in 1937.¹⁸ This left precious little time to develop a cohesive local political community suitable for self-government and to build the relationships needed for independence.

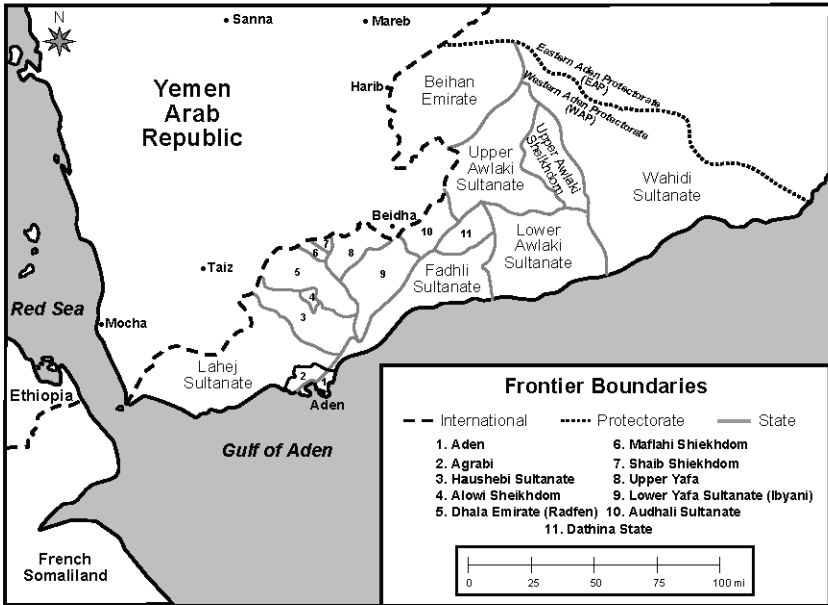


Figure 1. The Arabian Peninsula in 1965: Republican Yemen and the Federation of South Arabia.

Source: Created by Author.

For entirely sensible strategic reasons prior to 1945, Aden was a low priority investment that received an economy of effort approach from the British state. Unlike Hong Kong, there would be little direct financial investment and very few British colonists. A local trading community did emerge from Aden but mostly from Indian, Somali and Malay immigrants. They all made a strong contribution to the economic development of Aden but did little to build a sense of collective identity with local Arabs to form a new indigenous middle class ready for self-government.¹⁹

The British political position in the surrounding tribal territories was even less developed; in fact, they remained more or less untouched. Local tribal leaders were sought by the British for bilateral peace treaties to

protect Aden from invasion, and encouraged to resist any overtures from the unfriendly Imam who ruled in Yemen. However, there was no direct British civilian rule, civil service administration, or troops, stationed in tribal areas. This minimalist approach was logical for imperial decision makers across generations.²⁰ However, the lack of political, economic, infrastructure, cultural, social and military investment in Aden, and the neighbouring tribal states, meant that the British position was unusually weak by the time it attempted decolonisation in the 1960s.²¹

Consequently, when it came time to decolonise and create a friendly pro-British state in the 1960s the many favourable socio-economic conditions present in other colonies (such as Malaysia, Singapore, Nigeria, Tanzania or Kenya) were minimal or simply absent. The poverty of political, human, material and infrastructure resources may have made an insurgency more likely to develop and to organise an effective response once it did. In conjunction with the regional development of Arab nationalist concepts, the conditions in Aden provided fertile ground for external powers— Egypt and Republican Yemen—to encourage subversion and insurgency. It also made it more difficult to defeat due to the existence of genuine political grievances and lack of a long-established local political class on which to build a new state.

State-building and local allies: development of the FSA

Before examining the British attempt at state—building in South Arabia is it worth exploring the nature of the relationship between the UK and the various small tribal states within the Protectorates. The nature of the British position was not always well understood by contemporary British politicians and journalists who assumed a greater degree of British control over local government as was more prevalent in Africa.²²

By 1962 there was no British government administration or British military presence in the Protectorates and there never had been. This was in contrast to the UK colonial administration in some areas of Africa where District Officers (effectively local government) were a mix of locals educated and trained in the UK and British civil servants. In the Protectorates, British interests were pursued by a “Political Advisor” from the Colonial Office placed with the local leader to try influence the latter, develop local governance and ensure that the alliance held. The advisor had no power beyond that agreed by bilateral treaty agreed with the sheikh and little or no British colonial administration to get things done as he would see fit.²³

The military position was far from strong. All regular British military forces were stationed in Aden with tribal levies comprised of locally recruited Arabs present in the Protectorates. There was a positive aspect to

this posture: there was no British ‘imperialist occupation’ in the Protectorates to alienate the local populace and their influential leaders. Consent, consensus building and local partnership were essential to all British policies and actions. Any use of force would, by necessity, be deliberate and relatively slow (although that did not mean it would not be punitive or effective).²⁴

The negative aspect was that British interests could not be pursued by the quick use of unilateral force or by turning to British civil servants to develop the local economy and make favourable political decisions. They could only be achieved by persuasion of enigmatic local Arab tribal leaders who often presided over their own tribes in very loose or tenuous terms. It was a difficult position—not one well-suited to rapid nation building and decolonisation in the face of an externally-sponsored insurgency.

As Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, the UK’s Political Agent in the Western Aden Protectorate and later High Commissioner noted when he first arrived in South Arabia: “that in 1951 there should be a country and people such as these in the shadow of an imperial base, which Britain had occupied for more than a hundred years, I found incomprehensible.”²⁵ His observation was both an exclamation of horror at the position he was in and an insight into the chronic weakness of the British presence beyond Aden.

“The Federation of South Arabia” contained the Aden Colony and the Western Aden Protectorate and was intended to eventually include the Eastern Aden Protectorate. The Federation initially comprised the alliance of tribal leaders in the Western Protectorate who finally agreed in 1960 to form this union after ten years of British encouragement. By 1962, after even more protracted negotiations, the local leaders within the Aden Colony then agreed to join the Federation (pending Crown approval) to create “the Federation of South Arabia.”²⁶ Ultimately, along with their desire for a military base in the Middle East, this was the new state the British and their local allies were trying to build, protect, and grant independence to in the face of an Egyptian and Yemeni-sponsored insurgency. It is the state the latter two countries were determined to destroy and replace with something of their own creation. Despite all their propaganda about speaking for the ‘oppressed people of Yemen’ they too were trying to create something new from the miscellaneous local ingredients in South Arabia. In many ways their ideas were just as foreign as those attempting to be imported by the British.

Knowing Your Enemy: Who were the insurgents?

The insurgency in South Arabia was a complex conflict encompassing political subversion, economic unrest, a campaign for international

support, and increasingly extreme violence. The violent campaigns had distinct, but related, rural and urban theatres. In the Protectorates surrounding Aden there were autonomous rural tribesmen of a traditionally warrior-like society that were encouraged by Egypt, and Republican Yemen, to attack the British and their local allies who led the FSA. Down the road in relatively modern, economically developed Aden the populace was very different but also amenable to Arab nationalism, anti-colonialism and even new ideas such as socialism and communism. It was a potent cocktail that produced bewildering diversity of groups.

Overall, the many factions within the anti-British insurgency were predominately directly sponsored by Nasser's Egypt (especially the Egyptian Intelligence Services) or were at least heavily influenced by his concept of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism. Egyptian sponsorship and the heady ideas of the 1960s created a bewildering array of insurgents, political parties and militant trade unions. The insurgent groups were: the National Liberation Front (NLF), the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), the Organization for the Liberation of Occupied Southern Yemen (OLOS), the People's Socialist Party (PSP), the South Arabian League (SAL), the Popular Organization of Revolutionary Forces (PORF) and the peaceful in name only Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC).²⁷ A key precursor to all those groups was the general development of Arab nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century; in addition, the NLF emerged from the earlier anti-colonial organization the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN).²⁸

MAN was founded by a mix of Arab intellectuals and newly educated young working and middle class Arabs across the Middle East in 1948 as part of the collective Arab response to the (unexpected) destruction of Palestine. It was a regional network based on educated, middle class leadership that sought the advancement of the collective Arab nation. It took root strongly in Aden in the 1950s; MAN's first branch was established in Sheikh Othman District in 1959. By 1965, Sheikh Othman was key terrain for the insurgents and stronghold for the NLF; by 1967 it was a notoriously violent and hostile area for the ground-holding British unit.²⁹

MAN was the forerunner for the NLF providing in South Arabia; it provided "an efficient organizational structure that justified itself in conditions of clandestinity (sic)."³⁰ Significantly, MAN was a Yemeni unionist and pan-Arabist, anti-FSA and anti-British force but was not communist: they were nationalists first and socialists second.³¹ MAN's members were young middle class and working class locals displeased with all the other parties—essentially the Radio Cairo generation that did not join a trade union. Its reach was significant: MAN differed from all the other Arab

nationalist and socialist parties by getting into the rural areas of the Protectorate.³²

MAN's reach was extensive: it penetrated the private schools where the leaders of the Protectorates' sons were taught and into the British Petroleum (BP) oil refinery where many tribesmen worked in Aden and out to the expat community in Kuwait.³³

Thus, they reached into the FSA from multiple angles and were the ideal organization from which to develop a capable insurgency. This would take the form of the NLF. There were other movements at work in Aden inadvertently creating conditions which the NLF was ultimately able to exploit.

ATUC and the PSP were closely related and drove the anti-British, anti-FSA campaign of strikes and protests that preceded the Emergency in Aden. They had extensive contacts and support amongst international trades' unionists—including the British Labour Party. However, ATUC and the PSP had little grasp of tribal politics in the Protectorates and no more mandate to rule "the people" they claimed to be trying to liberate from their traditional ruling families and 'imperialism'. Importantly, the socialist movement had many members educated in Cairo and it was to Nasser and the EIS they turned for guidance and support.³⁴

Their opposition to the FSA manifested itself in repeated industrial action and international campaigning against 'imperialism'—the latter found a supportive audience in the UN General Assembly and British Labour Party. Although not coordinated with the NLF or FLOSY, ATUC and the PSP's subversion was a significant factor undermining British position in Aden and helped create the conditions for violence.³⁵

The SAL was the association of tribal leaders in the Western Aden Protectorate who rejected the British-supported Federation and sought instead to form a local Arab-league style alliance with Egyptian support. The key figure within SAL was the Sultan of Lahej—as already noted a powerful and enigmatic young figure in South Arabia. SAL proved a weak force that lost out to FLOSY and the NLF in the internal power struggle. However, it did provide a vehicle for dissident tribal leaders to gain experience and then join more effective anti-British, anti-Federation groups—such as the NLF.³⁶

The NLF was the ultimate victor in the South Arabian conflict. Formed in February 1963 at a conference in Sanaa, Yemen, the NLF was primarily an Arab nationalist, anti-British, socialist and then ultimately a Communist group.³⁷ They inherited much of the membership and infrastructure of the MAN: the same working class Adenis, Yemenis and tribal immigrants to Aden from the Protectorates.³⁸ Just like MAN they had con-

nections that spanned the rural-urban divide—unlike FLOSY and the trade union groups.³⁹ Their ideology was primarily Arab nationalist and anti-colonial but through the process of waging a clandestine war many members became increasingly radicalised towards communism. Hence by the end of the war the NLF was pushing away from immediate union with Republican Yemen and towards forming their own Marxist ‘people’s single party democracy’ (dictatorship).⁴⁰

The NLF were sponsored and directed by the EIS operating from Taiz yet were not dependent on that their external sponsor. Their leadership was sufficiently centralised to be capable of receiving support from the EIS but also decentralised enough to be able to cope with the very different conditions of rural and urban insurgencies. It is an area worth further study but it is likely that the NLF was similar to modern insurgent networks in not being a strict hierarchy that mirrors western organizations. Instead it was probably an adaptive network based on familial links and patronage as much as it was on ideology, discipline and tight security measures. Naumkin, a Soviet ‘advisor’ in the region at the time cited the NLF’s inheritance of MAN’s covert infrastructure, cellular organization and culture of discipline (“execute then discuss”) as central to their success.⁴¹

The NLF was consistently violent in its approach. It drove tribal violence in the Western Aden Protectorate in 1963-64 and then embarked upon a highly effective terrorist campaign that ripped apart the Aden police and Special Branch in 1964-65. Significantly, their political wing was less prominent than the other socialist factions making them more obscure to the British until late 1964. Even by late 1967 it was the leaders of FLOSY who were sought out for negotiations by the British rather than the NLF.⁴²

The Egyptians tried to rationalise this messy situation by encouraging the NLF and OLOS to combine into a new organization that would end division and make external support easier. In January 1966, FLOSY was created by this merger. However, it did not sit well with the NLF and by December 1966 they split away from FLOSY. The latter had to create its own militant wing to fight the NLF, and the British, hence the formation of PORF. The NLF then fought a fierce civil war with their former revolutionary comrades in FLOSY-PORF. By the time British military withdrew in November 1967 the NLF had prevailed. Their victory left many of the old ATUC, PSP and FLOSY figures responsible for the initial subversion that created the conditions for the Emergency dead or in exile in Egypt and Yemen.⁴³ The latter development was particularly ironic given the central importance of external support to the anti-British insurgency.

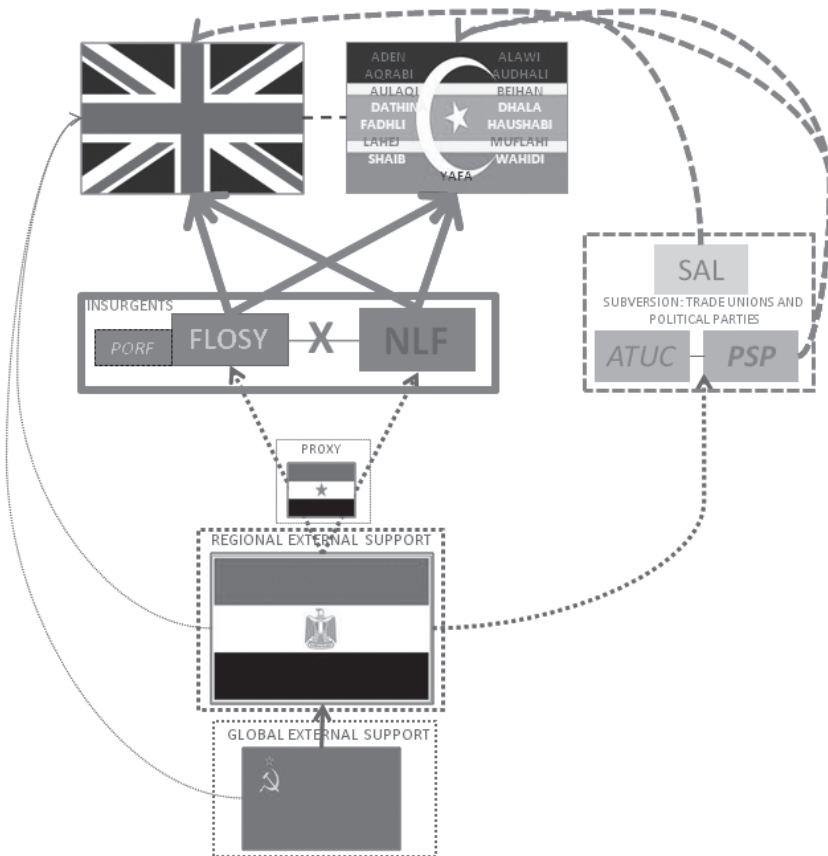


Figure 2. The Anti-UK, Anti-FSA Forces: Insurgents, Trade Unions, Political Parties and External Sponsors.

Source: Created by Author.

External Support: Egypt, Republican Yemen and the USSR

Understanding the British defeat in South Arabia is impossible without examining the role of Egypt in Yemen, the Protectorates and in Aden itself. The extent of Egyptian cultural influence should not be underestimated as the 1940s onwards saw a generation of literate, but disempowered, Arab men travel to Cairo for education. Here they imbibed anti-colonial ideas—with the UK as the primary colonial opponent.⁴⁴ From 1950 onwards, Nasser’s Egypt was the driving force for anti-colonialism as well as attempting to lead the Arab world in opposition to Israel’s occupation of

Palestine. In the Arabian Peninsula that meant continuing Egypt's conflict with the UK—defeated in 1956 in the Suez Canal conflict—by increasing Egyptian and Yemeni influence in South Arabia.

Egypt pursued a strategy with three complimentary components: first, to overthrow the Imam in Yemen by sponsoring a pro-Egyptian Republican coup in 1962 and then providing direct support by the Egyptian military to crush monarchist opposition. Second, directing its intelligence services (the EIS) to sponsor a campaign in the Western and Eastern Aden Protectorates of anti-British propaganda, political subversion and outright violence by sponsoring local tribes to attack British tribal allies (such as the Emir of Beihan). Third, by undermining British rule in Aden through pure political subversion—specifically, aiding the militant trade union movement and by criticising the UK position within the United Nations.⁴⁵ From 1963 onwards this support transitioned to the EIS directly supporting urban insurgencies in Aden through the NLF and FLOSY—although the NLF lost support from Egypt as the two insurgent groups split and fought their own civil war.⁴⁶

In addition to supplying weapons and guidance, Egyptian support was central to shaping the attitude of the population in South Arabia. Anti-British information operations largely came from Radio Cairo and through the Egyptian staff in Radio Sanaa. At the time there was no BBC World Service broadcasting programmes in Arabic in the region. In South Arabia the influence of Radio Cairo and Sanaa applied steady pressure against the British and the FSA. Their simple, clear messages resonated in the rural and urban areas; the local population was largely illiterate and not well connected to the outside world—especially in the rural areas in the Western Aden Protectorate.⁴⁷

There were limits to Egyptian support. It was not as intrusive as the North Vietnamese in their war against US forces in the Republic of South Vietnam. Entire Regiments of Egyptian or Yemeni Army troops did not march down from Yemen to directly contest control of the Protectorates or Aden (analogous to the North Vietnamese Army directly intervening to support the Viet Cong). Although it was clear to the British military at the time that they faced a campaign sponsored by Egypt, the latter chose to operate largely through its proxy regime in Yemen and deniably through the EIS.

There were risks and a substantial cost to Egyptian intervention in Yemen and support for the insurgency in South Arabia. By 1966 Nasser's deployment of his army to support the Yemeni Republicans counter-insurgency campaign had failed to achieve a decisive outcome. The British and Saudi-sponsored monarchists in the north of Yemen continued to hold

out and tie down increasingly large numbers of Egyptian soldiers in very unpleasant terrain. Despite the presence of 60,000 Egyptian troops in occupation the Yemeni monarchists persisted in opposing the pro-Egyptian regime; this commitment risked become an expensive diversion from defeating Israel. Nasser's strategy looked dubious at best and, at worst, as a quagmire from which Egyptian forces would struggle to escape without costing Nasser significant loss of prestige.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, Nasser and the EIS persisted in their subversion of the British position in South Arabia. Ultimately, the failure to overcome the Egyptian anti-colonial narrative was one of the central reasons for the British defeat in South Arabia. This proved particularly dangerous when the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Day War enraged Arab opinion; in South Arabia the Egyptian-sponsored insurgency channelled this emotion into increased anti-British violence. Despite offering no support to the IDF, locals readily accepted the insurgent narrative that Nasser's mighty forces could not have been humbled in Sinai without covert British support. This was a flat-out lie but it was a key factor in the triggering the worst day of anti-British violence in the entire conflict.⁴⁹ However, it represented an extreme example of the general misrepresentation of the strategic basis for the UK's position in South Arabia and the wider Middle East. Rather than being a case of stubborn colonialism, it was nested firmly in the UK's perception of its global military role in the Cold War.

Cold War Context: the UK's leading regional role

In 1963, the true British strategic goal in South Arabia was to establish a major military base for the UK's joint forces capable of securing British interests in the Middle East and to deter aggressive, expansionist communism led by the USSR. The latter was viewed as a threat to the traditionally pro-British regimes in the region—from the relatively minor sultans in the Western Aden Protectorate to the Trucial States, Oman and Kuwait. To that end it was necessary to pursue a new political arrangement in South Arabia by creating some kind of representative local government that would support the military base and be an ally in the region.

The strategy was formalised in the vision expressed by consecutive British governments in the 1950s through a series of defence reviews—the Defence White Paper of 1953 and the subsequent Defence Review of 1957.⁵⁰ The defence reviews were produced through collaborative planning between politicians, civil servants and the Combined Chiefs of Staff (all World War Two veterans—including Field Marshal Slim). The defence review recognised the difficulty of scaling back British defence spending and the size of the military in line with new, harsh economic realities for

the UK. It also recognised an enduring British commitment to support its local allies in the region—especially South Arabia and (implicitly) to remain a strong global player independent of the US and France.

The UK government foresaw a methodical British retreat from Empire in which Britain retained a global, or at least regional, military capability that would meet Britain's enduring Cold War and local security obligations without incurring excessive financial cost. Consequently, there was a requirement to develop and maintain a British joint military force capable of rapid deployment in the Middle East and East Africa. This began as early as 1953 when British leaders considered options for basing military forces abroad to support the intended British strategy for defence of the Middle East in the event of World War Three.⁵¹ The anti-colonial narrative developed by the Egyptians and Yemenis during the South Arabian campaign ignored this issue: the strategic thinking behind the UK's position in Aden was not to hold on as a colonial power at all costs but to be able to fulfil its anticipated leading role in the next global war against the Soviet Union.

It may seem ambitious to contemporary eyes but it was a feasible strategy as the UK retained defence commitments to protect long-term Arab allies such as Kuwait and the remainder of the Empire (renamed “the Commonwealth”) as shown by the intended Area of Operations in Figure 3. As a well-established military and commercial port with excellent access to vital sea lanes linking Europe and the Far East through the Red Sea and Suez Canal, the facilities in Aden fit the bill. Its value was as the next best option in the region after the bases in the Suez Canal were handed back to Egypt and it seemed unlikely that Israel would support permanent, or stand-by, UK bases.

Intriguingly, in 1953 British defence planning considered Aden as the strategic centerpiece of Middle Eastern defence but rejected it as less suitable than Egypt (Priority 1) and Israel (Priority 2).⁵² The bitter experience of the withdrawal from the military bases in the Suez Canal Zone in 1954 and the disastrous British-French war to remove Nasser over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company in 1956 resulted in a pragmatic shift in British strategy. The Defence White Paper in 1957 identified Aden as the centerpiece for the new joint Middle East Command that would lead and control this new, mobile, entirely professional military force.⁵³ This commitment to a base ‘East of Suez’ was reiterated in the Defence White Paper of 1964—even as it gave a date for granting full sovereign independence to the FSA by 1968.⁵⁴

The UK's defence and security policy meant a substantial political and economic investment in the Arabian Peninsula. There was little point

in spending precious wealth and political capital by establishing a large military base if the local political situation was not friendly and stable. Therefore there was a sudden sense of urgency to create the Federation of South Arabia from the disparate ingredients in the Western Aden Protectorate and Aden. Unfortunately, achieving this objective proved to be elusive, and painful, for all involved.

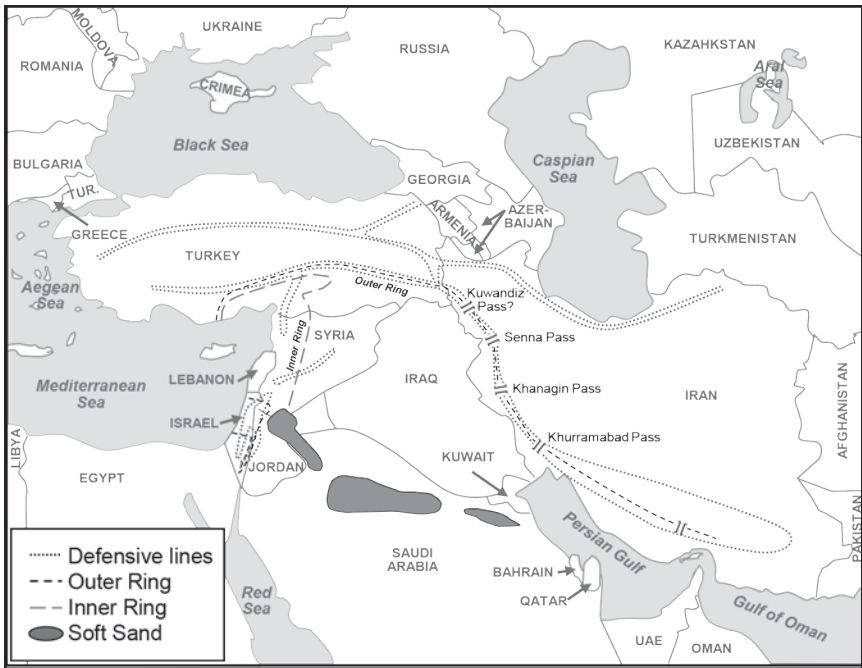


Figure 3. UK Defense of Middle East in the Event of a Further Global War, 1953.⁵⁵

Source: Created by Author.

Conflict Narrative: A Summary of Defeat

The war in South Arabia was protracted and often brutal. The conflict has been characterised with good cause as “the savage war in South Arabia.”⁵⁶ In the mountainous Radfan region, the bodies of dead British soldiers were beheaded and their heads carried back to Yemen for public display.⁵⁷ In Aden, grenade attacks deliberately murdered British civilians—particularly the families, children included, of British servicemen—as the NLF conducted its urban campaign in 1965.⁵⁸ Even by the far

from squeamish standards of British imperial conflicts, this was a deadly war with serious consequences for combatants and non-combatants on all sides.

The war officially began with the declaration of an ‘Emergency’ in Aden on 10 December 1963 when unknown insurgents tried to assassinate Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, the UK’s High Commissioner in Aden.⁵⁹ It ended on 30 November 1967 when British forces withdrew from Aden. British military forces were deployed on ‘internal security’ operations in Aden as part of a wider campaign of ‘Military Aid to the Civil Power (MACP).’ This framework was fairly common within the empire and for the British Army.⁶⁰ It placed British forces in support of civilian police and civilian government for a specific period—such as an ‘Emergency’—to defeat a threat that could not be overcome by peace-time civilian means alone. The British military would work ‘by, with and through’ the local British and South Arabian political structures. In theory this sat firmly within the British counter-insurgency philosophy of civilian primacy and close cooperation by all branches of the government machinery.⁶¹ In practice it was a very difficult challenge that will be familiar to any veteran of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In South Arabia, British forces were fighting an insurgency aimed at ending their presence in the country whilst trying to subvert, or destroy, the fledgling institutions of that would-be state. This in turn was complicated by a civil war, or at least intense competition, between factions within the government plus external support from neighbouring regional powers.

The presence of the latter was critical to the conflict. It is a mistake to restrict the narrative of the war to the period of direct UK-NLF violence (1963-7). The political competition began earlier than 1963 as part of wider regional security dynamics—the Cold War in general but also Egyptian-British rivalry in the Middle East. The support from Nasser’s Egypt, working in conjunction with their client regime in Sanaa, proved to be a catalyst for the anti-British, anti-FSA insurgency—even if by 1967 it did produce insurgent groups beyond their direct control.

As part of post-Second World War British policy of gradual, pragmatic decolonisation, the UK reviewed its position in Aden and the surrounding Protectorates. From 1950 to 1962 the British Colonial Office engaged in the very difficult process of taking the various bilateral treaties between the British Crown and local tribal leaders in the Protectorates and creating some kind of functional modern state that could join the British Commonwealth or at least become an ally upon independence.⁶²

The British strategy was to help its local tribal and Adeni allies establish a new federal state in South Arabia (the ‘Federation of South Ara-

bia’) that would consent to a long term UK military presence in Aden while remaining politically, and economically, oriented towards the wider western world. Once again, Aden was a means to an end within UK policy—this time to the UK’s security and defence goals in the Middle East. The ‘nation-building’ and decolonisation process may have been a worthy goal in itself it was fundamentally a means to an end: establishing a long term British base in the Middle East suitable for use in the Cold War and, ultimately, in the next global war.

The latter commitment was substantial: the Defence White Paper of 1964 confirmed the UK decision to base its entire Middle East Command—including maritime, land and air components, plus families—in Aden while granting the FSA independence by 1968.⁶³ This decision was driven by Cold War logic of requiring a regional hub to deploy British forces in the event of another global war.⁶⁴ It is the 1960s UK equivalent of the modern US military rebasing the whole of CENTCOM—headquarters and individual Service components—in one country in the Middle East.

Although secondary, economics were also important: in addition to the thriving port, a substantial BP oil refinery existed in ‘Little Aden’ that offered the prospect of long term growth and development for the FSA. However, the British task was complicated by the disparity between each of the states within the Protectorates and the totally different economic, social, cultural and demographic conditions within Aden.⁶⁵ An unintended consequence of the decision to build the FSA and a military base was the appearance of occupation and exploitation of South Arabia—a propaganda opportunity available for exploitation by Nasser’s Egypt.⁶⁶

The British faced a difficult conflict comprising distinct, but linked, rural and urban campaigns. Although not an easy proposition, it was feasible to attempt to shape Aden’s unruly local politics by the existing British political and military forces already present in the colony. However, the various autonomous tribal entities within the Western Aden and Eastern Aden Protectorates were a completely different challenge. Critically, loss of control of the Protectorates had the potential to cut Aden’s land lines of communication with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and generate an influx of anti-British tribal immigrants to Aden.

The Protectorates could also act as a secure rural base for a prolonged anti-British insurgency in Aden (as it ultimately did). This could be an important advantage for a small group of insurgents trying to stir a people into an anti-colonial consciousness—particularly as they became fired by Arab nationalism and ultimately their own form of Marxism. There is little surviving evidence that the leaders of the insurgency in the NLF deliberately designed a Maoist-style campaign.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the weak

British position in the rural areas was exploited as the NLF, helped by the EIS, gradually increased their influence in the Western Aden Protectorate before striking hard with an urban terrorist campaign in Aden in 1965.

Prior to the insurgents transitioning from predominately peaceful subversion to violent insurgency in December 1963, there was some cause for optimism for the UK. By 1962 long term engagement by the British Colonial Office with the leaders of the Western Aden Protectorate and local Adeni politicians finally achieved consensus on creating a new Federal State that could eventually achieve independence.⁶⁸ However, in response the UK faced fierce opposition from a rural insurgency and urban terrorist campaign by a heterogeneous insurgency comprising at least two major factions. Worse still the insurgents had external support and fertile anti-colonial international climate. Both major insurgent groups were armed, guided and supported by and the Egyptian Intelligence Services (EIS) through Republican Yemen.⁶⁹ The international community was predominately anti-British as the anti-colonial narrative pushed by Egypt, Yemen and the insurgents found strong support in the United Nations General Assembly, the USSR and even within the Labour Party in the UK.⁷⁰

Despite British efforts to cope by declaring an “Emergency” on 10 December 1963, the violence persisted in 1964 and then escalated sharply in 1965.⁷¹ In 1964 there had been only 36 incidents and casualties; in 1965 this had soared to 286 incidents causing 239 casualties. It would reach 510 incidents in 1966 and finally approximately 2,900 incidents by the final British withdrawal in November 1967.⁷² During this critical period in 1964-65, the National Liberation Front (NLF) and Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) were able to weaken the UK and Federal government’s position in the traditional tribal areas (most famously but, not exclusively, “the Radfan”) before launching an increasingly effective terrorist campaign in Aden from 1965 onwards. The British military found itself conducting a full-scale COIN campaign in urban and rural areas against a well-armed enemy that it did not understand and, at least in part due to the effectiveness of insurgent targeting, increasingly lacked the intelligence organization with which to regain the initiative.⁷³

In October 1964 the ruling party in the UK changed from the Conservative Party to Labour; after initially continuing with their predecessor’s campaign the Labour government lost patience over the course of 1965. In February 1966 a completely new policy was announced in a new Defence White Paper; it reversed the previous fifteen years of British policy by publically abandoning its commitment to support the Federation of South Arabia and withdrew British forces from ‘East of Suez’.⁷⁴ Independence would still come for the FSA ‘by 1968’ but there would be neither a per-

manent British military base nor honouring of the UK's security treaties with its local allies in the Federation. The political goal had shifted to an exit strategy; from 1968 local allies would be left to survive on their own.⁷⁵

The remainder of 1966 through to June 1967 saw UK forces, and the institutions of the would be Federation of South Arabia, struggling to cope with sharply increasing violence and exponential loss of credibility as the local population anticipated the impending victory for the insurgents.⁷⁶ The British military effort to at least train the FSA's security forces into an adequately loyal and competent force also foundered. The mutiny of Federal troops, and police, in Aden on 20 June 1967 showed the world in gruesome, unequivocal terms that the British approach was utterly ineffective. In the full glare of the world's media the local security forces in Aden mutinied and took over the old town 'Crater'. In the process twenty two British soldiers were killed and twenty seven wounded. British forces had been, at least temporarily, expelled from Cater and the NLF gained a great deal of prestige at the expense of the FSA and the British.⁷⁷

The final stage of the campaign from June-November 1967 saw the UK military conducting a fighting withdrawal in the midst of two factions of insurgents now engaged in a civil war. The political situation was no better: British politicians attempted to find some credible group within the insurgency to negotiate with and ultimately to hand over sovereignty to. Based on the original political objectives prior to the new policy in the Defence White Paper of February 1966 the campaign was clearly a defeat. Based on the new objectives of withdrawal and stability it was at best partially successful.⁷⁸ Either way, it was an ugly period and a tough experience for the British military. Could it have gone better—if so, would a better intelligence organization have made any difference?

Counter-factual: the Case for Intelligence-led Success

There was nothing inherently strong within the insurgency that gave it an unbeatable edge over the British. The diversity of the insurgency offered potential ideological, tribal and national divisions that could have been exploited by a better, or at least adaptive, intelligence organization. The anti-British forces were not overwhelmingly strong or united. The existence of Arab nationalist, Marxist, tribal and trade union-based groups meant significant internal rivalries existed. Some of these rivalries even had the prospect of becoming outright divisions. The intra-insurgent civil war in 1967 demonstrates the volatility of the anti-British insurgency and the potential for exploiting those differences.

Ideology and religion also offered prospects to identify, develop, and exploit fissures within the insurgency that could be exploited by the Brit-

ish and the FSA. The NLF's increasing move towards Marxism was also inconsistent with local conservative Islamic values.⁷⁹ In 1964-66 they may have been not ripe for exploitation or been readily apparent to the British. Nevertheless, they did exist and held the prospect for the development of sources, and opportunities for exploitation, had British policy not radically changed in February 1966. The British intelligence apparatus in South Arabia certainly required more time to learn, adapt and rebuild itself but there was cause for optimism that its enemies were sufficiently disparate that gains could be made in the long term. A key link to break, or at least exploit, was the external sponsorship from Cairo and Sanaa.

External support from Egypt and Republican Yemen was not risk-free. Coalition warfare is never easy—in conventional conflict or in COIN. Managing the political repercussions of external support is difficult for any insurgency—from the Viet Cong with the North Vietnamese and Chinese or Iraq's Jaish Al Mahdi with Iran. Provision of training and weapons is necessary but carries the risk of becoming 'owned' by your external sponsor. The NLF's narrative of expelling external oppressors was vulnerable if they became perceived as pawns for their northern neighbours or for Egypt. For the NLF and FLOSY it also carried the risk of empowering their rivals within the insurgency. They competed with each other while fighting the British and trying to woo two very different local communities: the deeply conservative, disparate tribes in the rural Western Aden Protectorate and the relatively well-educated, outward-looking workers in the thriving port city of Aden. This dynamic within the insurgency and its external support was another area that could have been exploited by British intelligence.

The Yemeni civil war created an additional vulnerability in the support network for the anti-British insurgents. Throughout the British campaign in South Arabia, Republican Yemen was involved in its own civil war with Saudi and British-backed Huthi Royalist forces operating north of Sanaa. The regional rivalries, cultural friction and political risk of being perceived as dominated by Republican Yemen and Egypt were a risky cocktail for insurgents in South Arabia—for the NLF and FLOSY. There was little prospect of the British not detecting their support network in Yemen as British mercenaries employed by elements in the British establishment were in Republican Yemen supporting the deposed monarchy.⁸⁰ It could have been exploited in military, political and propaganda terms to discredit the insurgency in the south. Overall, it was a potential vulnerability for an intelligence organization to identify and exploit if given sufficient time and resources.

The strategic conditions in the wider Middle East could also have shifted to support a British victory. Although lacking US support, the British imperial state was not isolated or systematically incompetent. The increase in Arab nationalism from the early twentieth century had produced a generation of Arabs strongly influenced by anti-British thinkers in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut. To some extent this was a ‘lost’ generation for the UK. Nevertheless, if a long term, generational view was taken there was grounds for hope. The UK had a long history in the region with many local allies not only in the would-be “Federation of South Arabia” but also in neighbouring Oman and Jordan. None of those allies, or Saudi Arabia, relished the prospect of another state falling into Egypt’s sphere of influence or the spread of communism in the region. If the British Army could once again prove it had the institutional capacity to learn and adapt to the new challenge then perhaps regional allies could be induced to enter the fray.⁸¹

Fourth, the British Army, and state, had experience within that generation of servicemen and civil servants of simultaneously conducting de-colonisation and COIN operations, with restricted resources, against communist insurgents. They also had a strong case for an increase in resources, and political support, due to the strategic importance of victory in South Arabia for the UK’s entire position in the Middle East. The success in Malaya has probably been used too many times as the alleged ‘British model’ of successful COIN. Nevertheless it is pertinent to the Aden campaign as an example that an economy of force military operation that starts poorly can learn and adapt in an alien culture far from home.

During the South Arabia campaign the British military leadership had excellent grounds for requesting an increase in support from the UK—at least prior to the fundamental change in national policy in February 1966. The measures taken to achieve success in Malaya were risky but done in a conflict arguably less critical to Britain’s global strategic interests than success in Aden.⁸² After all, the latter was the chosen location for Britain’s new Middle Eastern Command apparently essential for the UK’s leading role in the next global war. By the UK’s own definition, Aden was a key military base in a strategically important region that had already received substantial financial investment by 1966.⁸³ If the going got tough in South Arabia, and it did, there were sound reasons for the military to request greater support from the UK—at least an increase in intellectual effort, and collective sense of urgency, if not more military forces.

Requesting more resources, and bolder policies, is one thing; having functional structures in place to employ them against your adversary is another. The next chapter examines the UK and FSA civilian and military organizations and their supporting intelligence entities. It concludes with a

short overview of the British Army's intelligence doctrine, principles and organization as a framework for subsequent analysis and assessment of its performance in the campaign.

Notes

1. Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Cassidy, "The British Army and Counter-insurgency: The Saliency of Military Culture," *Military Review* (May-June 2005), <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/cassidy3.pdf> (accessed 29 November 2012).

2. Insurgency Research Group, "CNA Panel on British COIN," 31 July 2008, <http://insurgencyresearchgroup.wordpress.com/author/betz451/> (accessed 29 November 2012). David Kilcullen on the perceived complacency of the British military during the early stages of the Iraq campaign.

3. Amazon.com, 'Top 100 Military History Best-Seller,' <http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Military-History/zgbs/books/5011#3>. (accessed 2 May 2013).

4. The Aden conflict returned to British Army Officer PME in 2005. Commendably it is Case Study 4 as an example of a British failure in the new version of British COIN doctrine: Ministry of Defence. U.K. Army Field Manual, Volume 1, Part 10, *Counter-Insurgency Operations*, January 2010.

5. There is currently much debate within the US military on the 'true' lessons from counter-insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. Much of this revolves around John Nagl and Gian Gentile and their argument over the narrative of how the Iraq campaign changed, or did not, under the leadership of General Petraeus in 2007 and the ideas within FM 3-24. Part of that debate is the merit of alleged British methods such as 'hearts and minds' and 'population-centric COIN.' However, a study of the actual approaches used by British forces, in the full context of each campaign, shows coercion, robustness and co-opting local elites were as big a part of achieving success as the proportionate use of force and protecting the population from harm.

6. Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden, 1964-67*. London: Faber and Faber, 1968, 113. Vitaly Naumkin, *Red Wolves of Yemen*. New York: The Oleander Press, 2004, viii. Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in South Arabia, 1962-67*. Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2005, xviii. Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode*. London: Hutchinson & Co, 1968, 181.

7. The phrase 'we had an exit strategy not a winning strategy' was famously said by Lieutenant General Sir Richard Shirreff to describe the UK's operational approach in Iraq in contrast to the US decision to 'surge' in 2007. Testimony to the UK's Iraq Enquiry, <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/44178/20100111amshirreff-final.pdf> (accessed 29 November 2012).

8. Headquarters Department of the Army. Field Manual (FM) 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006, Ch III 'Intelligence in counter-insurgency.' Ministry of Defence. U.K. Army Field Manual, Volume 1, Part 10, *Counter-Insurgency Operations*, January 2010, Ch III 'Principles,' Ch V 'Intelligence.' Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peace-keeping*. London: Faber & Faber, 1971, Ch VI 'Insurgency Part 1: Tactics, the handling of information.' Julian Paget, *Counter-*

insurgency Operations: Techniques of Guerrilla Warfare. New York: Walter and Company, 1967, 58.

9. There are two excellent recent histories of the conflict: Walker, *Aden Insurgency* and Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker, Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006. However, the official history of the Intelligence Corps makes little reference to the conflict devoting only two pages to Aden. See Anthony Clayton, *Forearmed—A History of the Intelligence Corps*. London: Brassey's, 1993, 235-7.

10. This confusion is best shown by the title of Walker's excellent book "Aden Insurgency: the Savage War in South Arabia." The name Aden is relatively well-known in the UK compared to 'South Arabia' hence the need to use both in the title. Unfortunately that slightly undermines the wider focus of the book that shows the connections between the urban and rural insurgencies with each other and support networks in Republican Yemen and Egypt.

11. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 261.

12. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 140.

13. The terms used within the British military related to the specific political and legal context in which they had been brought into the conflict. 'Internal Security' against terrorism was the type of operation they were doing in Aden as, by definition, that is where the 'Emergency' status was initially in force by order of the FSA government supported by the Colonial Office and then increased with additional emergency powers by the High Commissioner on 6 June 1965. In the rural areas of the Protectorates British forces were deployed to support the request for assistance by local tribal leaders who comprised the government of the FSA. It is not clear how much this distinction affected the mind-set of the British military; for example, did this difference in legal framework discourage them from seeing the connection between rural and urban subversion (the insurgency) in South Arabia? Ultimately, the memoirs of senior officers such as Paget make it clear that the importance of the specific political and legal context was a significant factor for British forces. See Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 121, 138. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 201-202.

14. The contemporary definitions for the US Government and British Army are so close as to be nearly indistinguishable: US Government—"Insurgency can be defined as 'the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.'" British Army: "insurgency is defined as 'An organised, violent subversion used to effect or prevent political control, as a challenge to established authority.'" See United States Government. *Counter-Insurgency Guide*, Washington, DC: Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2009, 6. AFM 1-10, *Counter-Insurgency*, 1-4.

15. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 'Part II: the years of anxiety, 1954-8' and 'Part III: the years of hope, 1959-64.'

16. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 2-6. Trevaskis. *Shades of Amber*, 10-11.

17. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 14-16. It is interesting to note Trevaskis's concerns when he first arrived in Aden in 1951. He noted the weakness of the British position coupled with a general air of complacency "Shut away from

reality in the cosy imperial warmth of the Colony, British Aden carried on as norm... 'the season' was not over and we could still look forward to race meetings at Khormakhsar, the Aden Levies' Officers Ball, and the Yacht Club's Regatta." Intangible factors like complacency are by definition hard to measure. However, it is worth noting the echo in Prendergast's report on intelligence in Aden over 15 years later that observed the '9 to 5 mentality' in the Aden Intelligence Center (AIC) in October 1965.

18. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 4.

19. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 4-5.

20. This also applied to the British approach in Kuwait, the Trucial States and Oman. Domestic government was left to local leaders with the UK only taking a stronger, guiding hand with their external affairs. According to Trevaskis, the experience of losing substantial forces in Afghanistan in the 19th century was an important precedent for British officials such as Haines when considering the problem of how to protect Aden without incurring excessive cost and risk. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 10.

21. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 6-7. Peter De La Billiere, *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command*. Glasgow, UK: Harper Collins, 1994. 191-192.

22. There were differences in British rule in East, West and South African colonies. Relevant to British rule in South Arabia before the push for a Federation was the practice of training locals in administration. This extended to sending them to the UK for education and training. See Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 202-203.

23. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 13-14.

24. From his own experience of trying to use conventional forces on their own against tribal rebellions from 1954-58 when the British Agent to the Western Aden Protectorate, Trevaskis was a strong advocate of the use of focused air power, limited ground forces and unconventional warfare inside Yemen to defeat anti-British guerrilla warfare in the 1950-60s. This approach is nearly the exact opposite of the heavy conventional footprint employed in the Radfan in 1964. Trevaskis wrote a lengthy memo arguing against the latter but to no avail—see DEFE 28/147, declassified records of the Ministry of Defence, the UK National Archives, Kew.

25. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 8. It is worth noting that Trevaskis was an experienced Colonial Office figure with extensive service during World War Two, and after, in East Africa. He requested an assignment to Aden as he found it an intriguing challenge. However, upon his arrival he was concerned by the tenuous nature of the (limited) British administration compared to his previous experience of British colonialism in East Africa.

26. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 35. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 164-165.

27. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, "Annex B—Nationalist Organizations," 262, provides an excellent summary of the perplexing factions within the anti-British and anti-Federation insurgencies.

28. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 73-74.

29. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 67. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 123-124.

30. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 70.
31. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 68-69.
32. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 68.
33. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 73.
34. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 96-98.
35. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 55.
36. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 116. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 38.
37. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 80.
38. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 73-74. Of note, Naumkin flat out calls the MAN as the precursor organization to the NLF: "The use of this institution subsequently helped the MAN, which created the National Front, to organise armed struggle."
39. Naumkin, *Red Wolves* 68, 73, 233.
40. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, IX.
41. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 70
42. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 72.
43. Paget notes the irony that many FLOSY members took British passports and fled Aden. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 178.
44. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 26-28. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 90-95.
45. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 181, 191-193. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 118.
46. Egyptian support for the NLF-FLOSY and then retraction of support for the NLF was well-known to British forces in Aden. However, they were not able to turn that into an operational advantage. See Middle East Command, Newsletter 5, 27 June 1967, paragraphs 21-22. From DEFE 11/541, declassified records from the Ministry of Defence, the UK National Archive, Kew. Previously classified Secret, the document was the regular situation report from CINC MEC to CDS. Hereafter 'CINC MEC Newsletter.'
47. Travaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 58, 180. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 120.
48. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 159. DEFE 11/541, 'CINC MEC Newsletter 4,' 5 Oct 1966. Admiral LeFanu noted that prior to the British decision in February 1966 to abandon the FSA "Nasser was deadlocked in the Yemen and uncertain what to do there." He then went on to explain how the British decision to withdraw from the FSA had gifted back the strategic high ground back to Nasser.
49. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 231. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 202.
50. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 14. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 139.
51. DEFE 7/11, Annex to 'MOD Chiefs of Staff Memo on Defence of Middle East', declassified Ministry of Defence records, the UK National Archives, Kew.
52. UK Ministry of Defence (MOD), "Outline of Draft of Defence White Paper," (1953) declassified records, DEFE 7/11.
53. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 14-15.
54. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 113.
55. DEFE 11/541, 'MOD Planning Staff, Reallocation of Middle East Responsibilities, (CICC, West), Middle East Command—Area of Operations', Appendices 1 and 2 to Annex A, declassified Ministry of Defence records, the UK National Archives, Kew.

56. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 117, 239.

57. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 74-75.

58. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, "Chapter XII—Mutiny."

59. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 198-199.

60. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 122, provides a first-hand account of the military objectives and tasks set for the military in the Aden Emergency. Paget's outstanding post-Aden British Army career and work as a COIN theorist is well-known. Of note, for his personal experience in Aden it was as a Senior Staff officer within the 'Security Secretariat' established in 1965. He therefore saw first-hand the senior levels of the British civilian and military leadership in the conflict.

61. The British approach to "small wars" was never codified in a single document or conflict: it evolved over the best part of a century through experiences in India and the rest of the empire. The best articulation around the time of the war in South Arabia came in 1966 with the principles famously espoused by Sir Robert Thompson in his seminal work *Defeating Communist Insurgencies*. The first four of Thompson's five principles of defeating insurgency all revolve around politics, governance and legitimacy with the fourth principle explicitly stating that "the government must give priority to defeating the political subversion, not the guerrillas." This philosophy emphasised effective civil governance over military action to win the political argument against the insurgency. In this light, it is the natural for British forces to approach any colonial insurrection with the initial expectation that a civilian-led command structure must be established with the military a critical component but firmly in support of the civilian leadership. See Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 1966, 55.

62. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, Part III, Ch I 'Pax Federale,' 143-153. Walker. *Aden Insurgency*, 21.

63. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 113. Paget makes much of the difficulties incurred by giving the insurgents, and their Egyptian sponsors, a clear target. Trevaskis too had concerns about making this very public move. However, while recognising the validity of the criticism about public timelines it is also worth noting the general consistency of UK policy from the 1950-64 in seeking to protect British strategic interests while developing their many local allies into one cohesive partner. The true policy shift came in February 1966 when the UK abandoned its treaties and commitment to a military base.

64. As early as 1953 Aden was being viewed as a possible base for forces in the Middle East by the British Chiefs of Staff (albeit well down the list of preferred options). See DEFE 7/11, 'Outline of Draft of Defence White Paper 1953,' declassified Ministry of Defence records, the UK National Archives, Kew.

65. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 4-5.

66. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 159.

67. Naumkin omits Maoism in his analysis of the evolution of the NLF. It is odd there was no knowledge of Mao's rural-urban phases amongst the leaders of the NLF. Naumkin's omission may be explained by his own aversion to his former comrades in China following the Sino-Soviet split. Naumkin. *Red Wolves*, vi-xvii.

68. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 181.

69. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 71-73. Corroborated by private Foreign Office source who served in South Arabia with a regional remit.

70. The Labour Party within the UK was the main opposition party until its General Election victory in October 1964. They were a socialist party and had strong links to the Aden Trades Union movement—despite the latter undermining British rule and supporting political violence. Their strong ties to ATUC, or influence in educating its membership, were noted by Trevaskis and Naumkin as factors supporting the anti-British, anti-FSA subversion. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 178-179. Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, 28.

71. The “Emergency” was a legal distinction used by the British to great success in other conflicts that in contemporary times would be called COIN campaigns. It is probably best known from the Malayan Emergency. An “Emergency” could be called in a Crown colony for which the British monarch had direct sovereignty and therefore had the direct authority to amend the powers of the local executive, legislature and judiciary. It had the benefit of allowing local civilians to claim insurance for attacks against their property as it classified the violence as “terrorism” or “banditry” rather than an act of war (the latter being precluded by most insurance companies). Within an Emergency the local government was given specific powers for an indefinite period of time as recognition of the seriousness of the threat from political violence but with the understanding for all involved that it would be a temporary imposition of those measures and not a permanent change in civil rights. Typical measures taken were suspension of habeas corpus, use of the military to support the civil authority, internment without trial of suspected terrorists, restrictions on the right of trades unions to strike etc.

72. All statistics from Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 115.

73. A critical factor was neutralizing the Aden Special Branch with a near 100% success rate of murders against the Arab Detectives in 1964-1965. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 136.

74. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, ‘Ch 16: Abdication of Responsibility, 158. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 237.

75. There was a late U-Turn on the withdrawal of security guarantees in June 1967. However, by that point British forces were near bystanders to the NLF-FLOSY war and the FSA’s credibility was beyond retrieval. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 242.

76. Paget saw the conflict in five phases: “Phase 1:1965-66 ‘Normal Internal Security;’ Phase 2: Jan-Apr 1967 ‘Increase in tempo. The British Army takes over from the Civil Police.’ Phase 3: May-Aug 1967 ‘Armed insurrection. Battles for Sheikh Othman and Crater.’ Phase 4: Sep-Oct 1967 ‘Struggle for power between the NLF and FLOSY’. Phase 5: Nov 1967 ‘Final withdrawal’.” Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 176.

77. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 223. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, “Chapter XII Mutiny,” for a detailed account of the mutiny and the various political and tribal factors that triggered it. DEFE 11/533, UK National Archive, Kew, declassified

records of the Ministry of Defence, Middle East Command (MEC) for the primary source report into the mutinies—including a detailed breakdown of the casualties.

78. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 122-123.

79. Naumkin identifies the gradual emergence of Marxism within the NLF as a key factor within the movement and suggests it was possible as Islam was not that strong with the people in Yemen. Given the emergence of hard-line Wahhabi-based Islam and the demise of the Marxist state in Southern Yemen it is difficult to give too much credence to Naumkin's assessment—especially as he notes the presence of “esoteric Islamic sectarian groups” prior to the emergence of the NLF and the inheritance of modern Islamic networks on their Marxist ancestors. See Naumkin, *Red Wolves*, ‘Preface x.’

80. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 127-128; De La Billiere, *Looking for Trouble*, 208-211.

81. Building a regional alliance was one of the key factors in British success defeating the anti-Sultan insurgency in Oman—although it is less frequently cited than the military skill of the British and Sultanate forces in Dhofar.

82. For example, the decision to combine the most senior civilian and military leadership under Field Marshal (Retired) Gerard Templer was an expedient perceived as necessary in the extreme circumstances of that conflict. Other strong population coercion measures famously included compulsory population resettlement of the ethnic Chinese community and strict control measures for food. Neither approach may have been directly appropriate for South Arabia. However, it is telling that bold restrictions on Yemeni immigration to Aden, repatriation of agitators from Yemen and encouragement of immigration to Aden from other parts of the Commonwealth (such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia) were not carried through despite their potential to substantially change the balance of power in the UK and FSA's favour by breaking the insurgent hold on the local economy.

83. In October 1963 it was projected that over £4 million would be spent on housing in the short term with capital costs being £21 million in the longer term. See DEFE 11/541, declassified UK Treasury records, the UK National Archive, Kew.

Chapter 2

Command, Operations, and Intelligence

There has in my view never been an intelligence machine which was not open to some criticism and which could not be improved.¹

—Sir John Prendergast

I hardly dare repeat the recurring theme on the need for intelligence. The lack has hamstrung our operations and caused us unnecessary casualties. I am sure the point is not lost to the Gulf, but it may be harder to push in Whitehall because intelligence costs money.²

—Admiral Michael LeFanu

When British forces finally withdrew (unilaterally) from Aden in November 1967, their commander recognized the dire state of his intelligence organization. The Commander in Chief Middle East Command (MEC) Admiral LeFanu had earned a reputation for energy, intellect and commitment to the men and women of the three services within his force. His regular reports to the British Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) showed his forthrightness, grasp of local and regional politics plus a little self-deprecating humour. In his final analysis, LeFanu was blunt: intelligence had failed. How had British intelligence efforts in South Arabia ended in such apparently abject failure?

To analyse and assess the performance of the intelligence community it is essential to understand the context—particularly the civilian and military organizations, both British and South Arabian, they were trying to support. It is also useful to examine the way the British Army approached intelligence collection and analysis as the army provided the bulk of forces interacting with the local populace and insurgents. Finally, the principles of military intelligence theory and doctrine as understood within the British Army are also explored. The latter provides a framework for analysis of two intelligence principles—centralized control and exploitation—in the final chapters. So, who was the intelligence community trying to support and why was it such a difficult task?

Civilian Organizations, Structure and Culture

The British military faced a plethora of organizations to support, protect and liaise within its 'internal security' operation in South Arabia. One

thing that can be said for the collective British effort in South Arabia is that the bureaucracy did not die of loneliness; there was no shortage of organizations in Aden or the region. Ultimately, the British did not have anything approaching a sufficiently robust, yet flexible, structure for defeating an externally-sponsored, complex urban-rural insurgency while concurrently building the institutions of a new state. Quantity did not have a quality all of its own. That is not simply analysis with the benefit of hindsight. Contemporaries were frustrated by their inability to establish sound structures that could defeat the ever increasing threat from FLOSY and the NLF—particularly in intelligence.³

There were five inter-related organizations, or posts, attempting to defeat the insurgency in South Arabia: the British government in London with the Colonial Office in the lead; the Colonial Office's chief official the 'High Commissioner to Aden and the Protectorates' based in Aden; the local government of the FSA; the Aden 'Special Branch' of the long-standing local British-led police force. Finally, the British military under Middle East Command (MEC) trying to support the civilian power while being ready to support any other operations across the entirety of the Middle East.⁴ The Foreign Office was also an interested party with a supporting role, but no direct ownership, of Aden or the Protectorates; however, they did lead on British diplomacy in the wider Middle East—particularly with Egypt and Republican Yemen.⁵

Each British and Federal organization had its priorities, agenda and culture; they all could collect intelligence and contribute to the overall picture. Their ingredients were there for an intelligence organization with strong internal and regional coverage. However, they struggled to do so for a variety of reasons. Some were external—assassinations, intimidation and subversion by the NLF—but many were internal due to lack of administrative infrastructure and poor cooperation. The challenges, and problems, began at the top with the Colonial Office.

British and FSA Civilian Government Structure and Culture

The Colonial Office in London was the lead British government department with responsibility for Aden the rest of South Arabia. They led on supporting local government and British policy in South Arabia with a small network of individuals responsible to their senior representative in Aden (the High Commissioner). The High Commissioner was the representative of Her Majesty the Queen's government within a Commonwealth country; the post is equivalent to being an ambassador but varies in difficulty depending on the conditions in the recipient country.

For the conflict in South Arabia he was the de facto leader of the British state and focal point for the campaign. For the British military he was their political task-master in theatre reporting only to the Colonial Secretary in London (and therefore the British Cabinet). For all engagement with local Arab government the High Commissioner was the lead. The UK government in London relied on him for advice and expertise on policy and progress. There is no direct modern equivalent in Iraq or Afghanistan; however, the above list of responsibilities would probably resonate with any former Commander ISAF, MNF-I, or American and British Ambassadors.

From 1963-67, this was a daunting task. The High Commissioner was in charge of a complex rural and urban counter-insurgency campaign whilst concurrently building the institutions and leadership of the local would-be state. It was a very demanding post that exacted a high turnover of personnel. First the UK replaced long term South Arabia expert Sir Kennedy Trevaskis with Sir Richard Turnbull in late December 1964 as the British government sought its different political strategy in South Arabia.⁶ Appointing Turnbull was a tad unusual as he had just retired having been the (successful) final High Commissioner in Kenya during the Mau-Mau war. In 1967 Turnbull was in turn replaced by Sir Humphrey Trevelyan who saw the British presence through the difficult period of searching for insurgent interlocutors for negotiation, British military withdrawal and final political settlement with the insurgents as the new government in Aden.⁷

The High Commissioner had to be a highly skilled and credible individual. In South Arabia he had four major challenges. First, he had to balance engagement with local Arab political leaders in the Protectorates and their counterparts in urbanised Aden yet shape them into a new, coherent and viable political entity. Second, he had to provide the civilian direction to the local activities of a very combat-experienced military that itself was not just active in South Arabia but was responsible for the defence of the entire Middle East. The relationship with the British military required as considered an approach as the local tribal leaders and Aden trade unions; the British military was a close-knit community with significant independent political clout in Whitehall through its separate reporting chain to the Ministry of Defence. Third, he had to ensure mutual support and understanding with the ever shifting political scene, and inter-governmental department priorities, in London. Fourth, he was required to explain all of the above to the international media in a coherent, credible way that supported Britain's political goals locally, regionally and globally.

The High Commissioner did not have an extensive network of supporting civil servants across South Arabia to help understand what was going on, report any intelligence and enact British policy. In fact, the British footprint outside Aden was remarkably light. As already explained the Western Aden and Eastern Aden Protectorates were not under British control. A consequence of maintaining Aden's security through treaties with those tribal rulers was that prior to 1963 the British colonial presence in much of South Arabia amounted to a small handful of 'Political Advisors'. Any troops present were local 'levies'; there were no teams of British civil servants; no protective wire, no bodyguards. Instead tribal leaders willing to accept one had a middle aged (or even young) British man as a 'Political Advisor'.

The advisor faced a tough challenge: rely on his local host's "hospitality" (in effect, for personal protection) while encouraging the same host to develop better local government, and maintain tribal alliances, conducive with overall British policy. While very vulnerable to kidnap, or murder, these men were experts in their areas. It was from this background that Sir Kennedy Trevaskis came prior to his appointment as the High Commissioner in 1963. However, from an intelligence collection perspective even if they had the administrative equipment necessary they hardly had time to sit down and write up what they knew and precious little means to transmit it back to Aden.⁸ Thus the Colonial Office was unable to exploit its own corporate knowledge fully and share it with the military.

The High Commissioner and his Political Agents faced a stern challenge in leadership and coordination but could at least draw on the bureaucratic traditions of long-standing British institutions—even if the latter were not outstanding examples of seamless unity of effort. The challenge facing the embryonic government of the FSA was even tougher: they were learning the mechanisms of modern government for the first time, trying to overcome their differences to achieve a common goal while concurrently building the Federal government itself. It set British intelligence a serious challenge: multiple, disparate organizations to support simultaneously.

By 1963, the political organizations in South Arabia were a combination of traditional British colonial and new local federal structures (see figure 3). The traditional tribal territories of the British Western Aden Protectorate had formed its would-be Federation with Aden to create the FSA.⁹ Aden Colony was still formally under British sovereignty (and therefore direct government should the Crown choose to exercise it) but was ruled day to day by the locally-elected Aden Legislature. The latter had a strong left-wing, anti-British agenda. Ultimately, these various structures meant that British influence would have to be exerted on multiple local actors

with competing agendas while under the pressure of increasingly strong subversion and violence.

Aside from the day to day dangers of alienating locals through inadvertent personal and cultural mistakes, there were two really big risks for the Colonial Office to contend with: one, the vulnerability of the Federation to a split between the Protectorates and Aden; two, the local institutions being intimidated, subverted or infiltrated by the insurgents. The election of pro-ATUC parties to the Aden Legislature had done just not and thereby complicated the urban counter-insurgent campaign. If that were to be prevented across South Arabia then their local allies would have to form an effective government against significant time constraints, internal and external political pressures. An efficient British, and Federal, intelligence organization would have been invaluable. However, even if British and Arab leaders had realised their peril the culture and individual agendas of the various entities in 1963-65 would probably have frustrated the creation of any such outcome.

If the above wire diagram looks confusing, or even intimidating, then it is probably doing justice to the scale of the task facing the Colonial Office in South Arabia. For the rulers of the new Federal Government there was no shortage of difficulties: as the traditional rulers of fiercely independent tribal areas they had to maintain their own position within their home territories and guard against their traditional rivals becoming too powerful. Those rivals were now their fellow ministers of state. They also had to maintain credibility within their own tribal constituencies while being a government minister in the new capital El Ittihad. Finally, they had to manage relations with the leaders of the Aden legislature who came from a very different educational and political background yet held precious economic capabilities essential to development of the new state.¹⁰ In summary, while they were far from uninterested spectators, the leaders of the FSA had many higher priorities than creating an intelligence agency and may even have seen the development of one as a threat to their personal autonomy.

From an intelligence collection and analysis perspective the British were trying to sprint from a cold start in South Arabia. In 1963 there were no formal indigenous intelligence organizations within the tribal territories and little in the way of grass-roots domestic administration on which to try and build. Even by 1967 little progress had been made in developing the intelligence apparatus of the FSA.¹¹

As the conflict began the British intelligence effort had to rely on the existing Colonial Office political agents stationed in the tribal areas, liaison with the FSA government in the capital. When the war increased in

intensity British Army units had to create their own special units to try and reduce the gloom obscuring so much of their AO (more below). Perhaps external collection on the insurgency's support network in the rest of the Middle East could redress the balance. However, there is little sign that collection capability of SIS and GCHQ across the region was able to fill the void.

Much of the material relating to SIS and GCHQ activity in support of the British mercenary campaign against Republican Yemen, and against the insurgents in South Arabia remains classified, or is redacted from de-

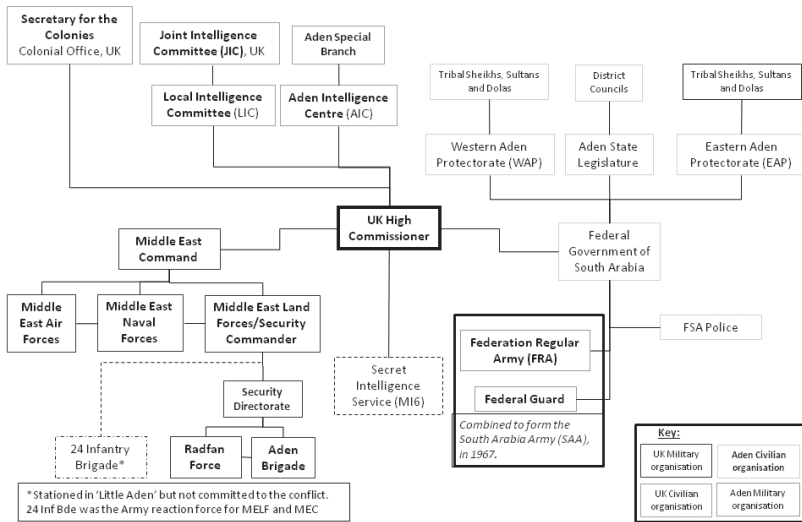


Figure 4. British and Federation of South Arabia Political, Military and Intelligence Organizations in South Arabia, 1963-7.

Source: Created by Author.

classified documents.¹² Little is said in most accounts of SIS and GCHQ (or the JIC) in the period.¹³ From the material in the public domain it is clear both agencies focused on the human and technical aspects of the EIS support network running from Republican Yemen into South Arabia but did so with as few resources as possible.¹⁴ There is no sign that the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) ever prioritised the war in South Arabia—despite it being the site for the UK's strategic military capability for the whole of the Middle East.¹⁵ A key coordinating organization developed to support the British Imperial General Staff (and senior government departments) in the Second World War, the JIC was the center of British intelligence prioritisation, collection and assessment.¹⁶ The JIC's failure to prioritise intelligence collection to support the war in South Arabia is dif-

difficult to explain—particularly given the central importance of MEC to the UK’s intended role as defender of the Middle East in another global war. The absence of material from the JIC that placed South Arabia as a higher priority than tracking the internal political dynamics within the Warsaw Pact is strong evidence of the dysfunctional British policy approach and its negative impact on intelligence in the campaign.¹⁷

Aside from SIS and GCHQ, there were two organizations who could have worked more closely together to improve intelligence gathering against the insurgency and pursue a campaign to defeat it—the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. This was a big challenge for the British state that required superb coordination and unity of effort between two powerful government departments. The friction between the two was probably a substantial obstacle to shared understanding, better intelligence and unity of effort that could address the external support for the insurgency.

British Tribes: the Foreign Office and Colonial Office

The lead department for all international relations in the modern day UK is the “Foreign and Commonwealth Office” —the FCO. The FCO’s precursor was the Foreign Office (FO) and the Colonial Office (CO). As already mentioned, the leading British organization in South Arabia was

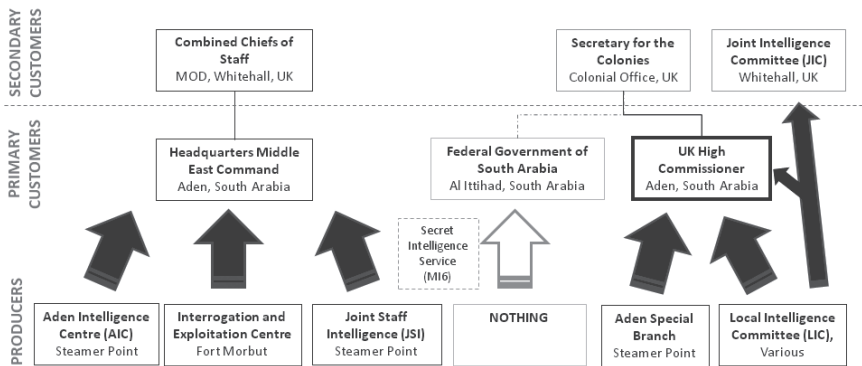


Figure 5. UK and Federation Intelligence Organizations in South Arabia, 1963-67.

Source: Created by Author.

not the Foreign Office; it was the Colonial Office. However, the relationship with the two states sponsoring the insurgency in South Arabia was the responsibility of the Foreign Office not the Colonial Office.

Inevitably, the presence of two separate institutions managing the politics of a complex, externally sponsored insurgency resulted in friction.

For example, following the Republican coup in Yemen the FO was keen for the UK to recognise the new regime and establish diplomatic relations. However, the CO was completely opposed as this would undermine the government of the Federation of South Arabia and remove an important bargaining chip for the UK. Eventually the FO's argument for recognition won out; this left the UK in the odd position of going against the express wishes of its local allies the FSA by officially recognising a government whom they were simultaneously trying to overthrow through the use of ex-UK Special Forces personnel as mercenaries.¹⁸

It is worth noting the internal culture between the FO and CO. The former was the first amongst equals with a culture that gravitated towards classic diplomacy, dinner parties and the more refined aspects of international relations. The FO was also the parent organization for the Secret Intelligence Service (more commonly known as MI6) and for the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The presence of two out of three of the UK's intelligence agencies within the FO stable gave that organization even more influence within the corridors of power in Whitehall. It did not mean that the FO was the expert on South Arabia, the Middle East or COIN. Prior to the merger that created the FCO in 1968, the FO had only three postings in Africa—Cairo, Addis and Khartoum—all considered as punishment postings for diplomats who had blotted their copybooks.¹⁹

In comparison the CO had a more practical, results-oriented culture. Its presence was across Africa and Britain's protectorates in the Middle East (such as Palestine, Cyprus and in South Arabia) and had a tradition of providing political advisors who got their hands dirty managing the empire and building alliances.²⁰ Of course, both the FO and CO recruited predominately privately educated young men from middle class families and a common Oxbridge education (usually in Classics) but that was par for the course in the British civil and intelligence services. It did not preclude a mutual rivalry—intentional or incidental—particularly in shaping perceptions in London that drove British policy.²¹

The High Commissioner would have been forgiven for expecting his views on what to do to defeat the Egyptian-sponsored insurgency would carry most weight. However, his 'colleagues' in Sanaa and Cairo were all career diplomats in the FO working to subtly different agendas in a different organization. In itself that is not a critical failing but it can have a cumulative effect on the attempts to create the unity of effort that is essential in a COIN campaign. All FO and CO personnel in the Middle East regularly briefed back to their respective Head Offices in London. The existence of two separate lines of communication back to the UK inevitably risked

different assessments of the situation being written and received. Perceptions and bureaucratic agendas in the corridors of Whitehall would be a key arena to shape the campaign in South Arabia—a vital issue when the overall political objective was being questioned in 1965.²² Finally, there was an additional Colonial Office organization essential to law enforcement and internal security throughout the colonies—the ‘Special Branch’. This organization would be the focus for the insurgent’s very effective counter-intelligence campaign and British attempts to regain the initiative.

The Aden Police ‘Special Branch’—a Canary in a Cage?

The British state in the Aden started the conflict with some colonial organizations with the potential to be sources of strength against the anti-British insurgency. The most important organization that could have provided a much needed shield was the Aden police ‘Special Branch’. Special Branch was part of the police force and not the military or intelligence services; however, as the name implies it was a unique organization with distinct responsibilities that separated it from regular police. The Aden Special Branch was part of the traditional British approach to police and intelligence work in the colonies. Its task was investigating political subversion and counter-terrorism. Critically, it comprised both British and locally recruited Arab personnel as detectives. The presence of the latter was deemed absolutely essential as it provided local language, cultural and political skills that had the potential to infiltrate, target and generally frustrate any anti-British organization.

A healthy Special Branch had proven its worth in other campaigns. Developing the capability of the Special Branch in Malaya had been a key part of that successful campaign. A key moment there was the separation of the Special Branch out of the Criminal Investigation Division so it had the ability to focus on political subversion and violence—in other words, to tackle the insurgency and not deal with regular non-political crime.²³ However, it was essential that Special Branch be resourced, and its local detectives protected, for the British to have any chance of achieving their political goals.

It was not unknown for insurgents to understand the importance of the British police’s specialist units—especially the Special Branch or departments with a similar political role. There was historical precedent for targeting this kind of police force within living memory and very close to home. In the Irish War of Independence from 1916-1921, the Irish Volunteers led by Michael Collins deliberately targeted the members of the G Division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police to deny the British state in Ireland its most useful servants.²⁴ The loss of those detectives was a criti-

cal loss of capability for the British state in Ireland as it lost vital local knowledge and prompted the escalation of that conflict—particularly the increase in military support and the recruitment of the notoriously brutal paramilitary organizations Black and Tans and police Auxiliaries.

The NLF and FLOSY hit the Aden Special Branch hard. From December 1964 to June 1966 they killed sixteen Arab detectives and made the remainder non-effective through intimidation.²⁵ The losses suffered denied the British local talent and expertise that they struggled to replace. The result was a law enforcement and intelligence capability that was recognised as inadequate by the highest levels of the UK political and military leadership.²⁶ It blinded the counter-insurgent causing it to rely on the deployment of the army, a broadsword not a scalpel at the best of times, to re-establish internal security.

The cultural influence of Special Branch extended into the military. As the army grappled with its lack of intelligence from the local populace it formed plain clothes reconnaissance units within regular army battalions to collect intelligence and target insurgents. Army units named them “Special Branch;” this is a compliment and also an implicit criticism. If the real Aden Special Branch was functioning effectively as an intelligence—gathering, counter-terrorist force then the army would never have formed their own ad hoc “Special Branch” to fill the vacuum.²⁷ In short, their loss was a major blow to the ability of the intelligence organization both in understanding the scale of the insurgency and then being able to do anything to remedy the deteriorating situation.

Integration of the Colonial Office and FSA civilian organizations with the British military in South Arabia was a major challenge for MEC. It fundamentally shaped the character and structure of the intelligence organization. To understand the latter it is essential to track the changes to the British military C2 structure and its evolving operational approach to defeat the insurgency.

Military Organizations: Tasks, Structure and Culture

The British military in South Arabia comprised the MEC and its subordinate Service components—Middle East Land Forces (MELF), Middle East Air Forces (MEAF) and Middle East Naval Forces (MENF). The land component MELF was in the lead for the South Arabia campaign although it did receive essential support from the air and naval services. MELF did not have an abundance of resources; there were only two brigades—the ‘Aden’ Brigade and 24 Infantry Brigade—and their AO spanned ‘from Swaziland to the Persian Gulf’.²⁸ This was a relatively small quantity of combat power to conduct an urban ‘internal security’ operation and a con-

current rural guerrilla conflict. Their missions were even more difficult when considered in the context of the changing British strategy within South Arabia.

In 1963 the task facing Commander MEC and Commander MELF was undeniably tough: how to develop the UK's brand new major operating base suitable for projecting forces across the Middle East and West Africa while defeating a rural and urban insurgency sponsored by Egypt and Yemen all without requesting any more resources or jeopardizing the overall policy of preparing the FSA for independence by 1968. In February 1966, that task became bleak as the UK policy shifted to an exit strategy: how to create the optimal conditions for all UK forces to withdraw from South Arabia while supporting a (fragile) political process intended to transfer sovereignty to some kind of responsible government yet concurrently mitigate the terrorist threat from the insurgents.²⁹ Nevertheless, British commanders pressed on and tried to evolve a C2 structure that could meet the ever-changing challenges of the conflict.

Evolution of British Operational Command and Control (C2)

From 1963–64 the British counter-insurgent leadership rested on the relationship between Commander MEC, GOC MELF and the High Commissioner. Both senior officers were still responsible for rest of the Middle East AO—a key distraction as the EIS and NLF campaign quietly progressed. Tactically there were two brigade commanders working together—24 Infantry Brigade providing forces for the Radfan, Little Aden and the rest of the MEC AO and the Aden Brigade charged with Aden itself. In a masterful piece of understatement, Paget described this framework—plus the understandable, if not strictly appropriate, personal interest from the RAF and Royal Navy 2-Star Commanders—as “not a satisfactory arrangement.”³⁰

From 10 December 1963 to 5 June 1965 the C2 system just about muddled through. In this period, British forces had to cope with the guerrilla campaign in the rural areas of the Western Aden Protectorate and low-tempo, but effective, urban ‘terrorism’ beginning within Aden. Compared to the subsequent annual increases in violence, Aden in 1964 was relatively low—perhaps misleadingly so as the NLF infiltrated, subverted and set conditions for escalating the conflict on its terms.³¹ Instead, British forces concentrated on their deployment of the ‘RADFORCE’ into the Radfan area of the WAP in the vain hope of reversing NLF influence in the tribal areas around Aden.³² However, the spike in violence within Aden in 1965 provided the impetus to reorganize the overarching C2 architecture (along with British recognition of the inadequacy of the existing arrangement).

On 5 June 1965 the situation in Aden was recognized as sufficiently serious to require the appointment of a ‘Security Commander’.³³ He took responsibility for the security aspects of the campaign in Aden; the natural choice was GOC MELF. The latter thereby ensured a competent force with guaranteed political loyalties was at the center of coordinating all Federal and British security operations. The latter would prove vital from 1966 onwards as local forces proved increasingly unreliable as the power of the NLF increased with the British exit looming ever closer on the horizon. However, he did not have the same authority in the Protectorate as it was not covered by the terms of the Aden Emergency nor was he responsible for the overall political dimensions of the campaign.

This period saw other changes to the overall structure of British forces—such as the establishment of the Security Secretariat as a Staff for the High Commissioner and a series of committees to achieve unity of effort across all branches of the British and Federal government.³⁴ The outcome of the changes in 1965 was a British campaign in Aden that placed the High Commissioner in the top leadership role, the senior British Army officer in charge of security and provided at least a rudimentary framework for cooperation across civilian and military organizations both British and South Arabian. With the exception of not combining the ‘Security Commander’ with the post of High Commissioner, this was reminiscent of the successful approach in Malaya.

Providing a clear military commander to act as the focal point for security in Aden was a step in the right direction, would it be enough to address the progress made by the insurgency? For that matter, were there any guarantees that it would receive enough time from the authorities in London to regain the initiative and start making progress? The answer to both those questions lay, at least in part, with achieving the best possible understanding of the enemy and the region. However, by the 1965 the intelligence organization was also inadequate and underwent major changes. The post of Director of Intelligence was finally created and filled in early 1965 by A/Brigadier Tony Cowper. He was a professional British Army, Intelligence Corps officer.³⁵ His task was far from easy as the intelligence apparatus in Aden not only had multiple organizations to support but also was trying to rebuild itself with badly damaged components.

British Intelligence in South Arabia: Organizations and Structure

Cowper had a difficult task in creating a collective team from the disparate groups active in South Arabia. There were six intelligence organizations active to contend with and a potentially critical one that was con-

spicuous by its absence: one, the Aden Intelligence Center (AIC); two, the Aden Special Branch (co-located with the AIC); three, the Interrogation Center at Fort Morbut; four, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS); five, the Joint Staff Intelligence (JSI); six, the Local Intelligence Committee (LIC). The latter worked directly for the JIC but ultimately all intelligence organizations were required to follow the direction as set to and by the JIC in London.

The absentee was any kind of intelligence organization, or staff, re-

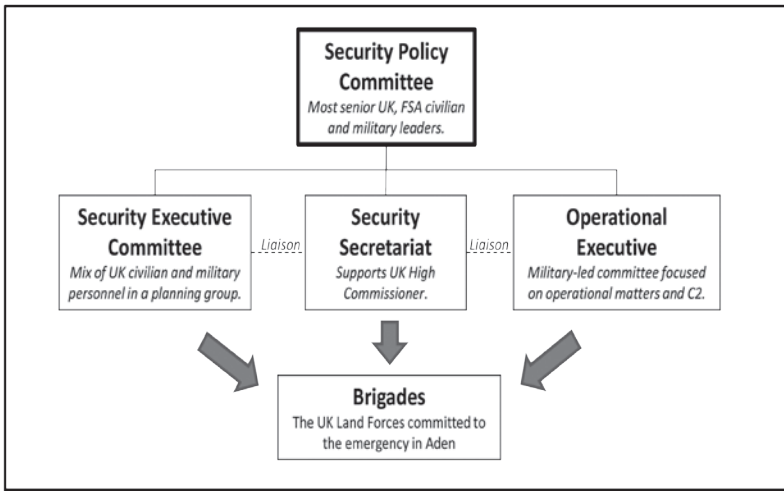


Figure 6. UK Security Forces C2 in Aden, 1965-February 1967. ³⁶

Source: Author's own diagram based on Julian Paget, *Last Post*, 130-1.

sponsible for supporting the FSA. While tribal leaders who comprised the ministers of state of the Federation had their own sources and methods, the lack of a joint framework of the British effectively separated the would-be allies by restricting intelligence sharing. The latter would have created opportunities for both parties: much lay fallow in the heads of the Federal leaders that could have corroborated technical intelligence only available from the British. The failure also hurt the prospect of achieving the exit strategy. It allowed the Federal government to drift towards independence without developing an intelligence organization that stood any chance of enduring the withdrawal of UK forces and serve as a conduit for sharing intelligence with their would-be British allies in the long term. One of the few potentially bright spots on the horizon for Cowper was the existence of a British centralized intelligence center—the AIC—that, if improved,

had the prospect of producing useful all-source intelligence should it be made to work effectively.

The AIC was a joint military and civilian intelligence center organization that also contained the Aden Special Branch. It was led by Cowper who controlled all its activities as the Chief of Intelligence (CoI) or 'Director Intelligence'. The AIC was intended to be the central organization for tasking of intelligence collection and also for analysis and assessment of the material that was collected. In modern US terminology it was the "Fusion" Cell; in UK terminology it was the All Sources Analysis Cell but also the organization that should direct the intelligence collection process in accordance with the priorities of the High Commissioner and the Security Commander. Its scope was intelligence for the whole of South Arabia. However, it failed to live up to its potential and was recognised as being very poor throughout the campaign.³⁷ Analysis of the AIC and its failure to achieve the role assigned to it is the subject of chapter 3.

As noted earlier, the Aden Special Branch (SB) was responsible for intelligence, counter-terrorism and counter-subversion but by early 1965 had been made essentially non-effective by NLF assassinations of its Arab officers. When the NLF's campaign went up several gears in 1965 it should have been Special Branch warning of impending threats, identifying the members of the NLF network, target them for intelligence gathering and executive action as decided by the authorities. Unfortunately they were blind and that lack of capability created a destructive cycle. Their losses made it difficult to take any of the necessary steps to improve their position: they did not know where to start, had few language skills and local Arab officers left to get out and regain the initiative. This deficiency was also recognised at the national strategic level in the UK as a major limitation in improving the intelligence capability in the South Arabian campaign. Getting Aden Special Branch back on its feet, improving the AIC, collecting intelligence again and targeting terrorists was a major part of the British reorganization of intelligence in 1966.³⁸

The situation in the Protectorates was even worse: as territories never directly administered by the British there was no formal civilian local police force and, therefore, no Special Branch as tribal leaders had always relied on their own kin, the Tribal Guards or the Aden Protectorate Levies.³⁹ All this same, this too was a factor that contributed to the blindness of the UK and its local allies as it tried to find the links between the 'terrorism' they experienced from the urban insurgency in Aden and the guerrilla war in the Western Aden Protectorate. This paucity of effective collection agencies multiplied the problems of the intelligence agencies responsible for analysis and assessment.

The Local Intelligence Committee (LIC) was a special committee set-up within South Arabia to make intelligence assessments at the strategic level. It was led by the Deputy High Commissioner and comprised a variety of British civilian and military personnel. There was no local Arab representation on the LIC. The LIC was responsible for intelligence assessments from South Arabia for the High Commissioner, senior military leaders but also the senior figures in the UK. The latter exercised a strong degree of influence through the Joint Intelligence Committee (the JIC) that had its local representation through various LICs in the colonies.

The JIC was, and is, a very important organization within British government circles. It was founded in 1936 to provide comprehensive intelligence assessments for the Chiefs of Staff and senior ministers in the British government. It came into its own during World War Two as it provided both an agreed “British position” on intelligence assessment that could inform all of government and be shared with allies as appropriate. The development of the JIC as the key intelligence organization in UK that brought together input from across government was a very important development in British intelligence and government history. It is the subject of an outstanding work by the late Sir Percy Cradock a career British civil servant and former Chairman of the JIC. For the purposes of this document, suffice it to say the JIC was a committee formed from across UK government and intelligence circles responsible for agreeing and providing an overall intelligence assessment for the top level of the British military and civilian leadership.⁴⁰

Returning to the LIC, its membership mirrored the cross-government structure of the JIC. The LIC members all worked in different British colonial organizations in South Arabia and were not all intelligence professionals. Its membership, competence and output were a source of concern and criticism—this issue is explored in more detail in chapter 3.⁴¹ The LIC’s role was as an overall group responsible for overseeing intelligence output from Aden. They would gather together to consider intelligence material, respond to specific questions from the JIC and provide overall assessment documents. Their assessment followed a separate channel from the intelligence perspective sent back to the UK from the High Commissioner and Commander MEC. Whilst no one perspective was decisive in shaping British government policy, the assessment from the LIC was part of the process that helped decision makers understand, or misunderstand, the nature of the war they were facing in South Arabia.

The “Joint Staff Intelligence” (JSI) was the Tri-Service intelligence staff set-up to support Middle East Command. The JSI was a mixture of all three British services with both professional Intelligence Corps per-

sonnel and non-intelligence specialists present. They were responsible for processing intelligence at the operational level for Middle East Command. They were probably led by an Army colonel as the General Staff Officer 1 (GSO1) for intelligence; he may or may not have been an Intelligence Corps officer. The JSI was the highest level military intelligence organization in South Arabia. In terms of distinguishing the JSI from the AIC, SB or the LIC the key difference is the JSI being all military personnel directly accountable to the Commander in Chief Middle East Command. Their focus was primarily on military affair—"security intelligence"—within South Arabia but also had an Area of Intelligence Responsibility (AOIR) that covered the whole of the Middle East. Their effectiveness would depend on how smoothly they worked with the AIC, LIC and other agencies as potentially they could have competing assessments and priorities.⁴²

An intelligence organization for the Protectorate/Federal level of government in South Arabia was a major absentee. The surviving material held in the National Archive shows there was considerable effort expended in London and South Arabia discussing the development of an intelligence organization to support the new Federation. It was well known that British political advisors worked alone and had very little ability to write down what they knew for central collection and processing. This subject is analysed in more detail in chapter three. The key issue is the British failure to develop an organization that supported their local ally and exploit all the intelligence available to them. This failure is particularly egregious given the success the MAN and the NLF had in first building its strength in the WAP before launching its urban terrorist campaign in Aden in 1963-65.

The lack of an integrated, collaborative intelligence structure in South Arabia also went against the hard-earned, and very recent, experience of having one organization, preferably under the leadership of one man, responsible for coordinating the intelligence effort in the conflict.

Ideally there should be one single organization responsible for all security intelligence within the country. If there is more than one, it is almost impossible to define the respective responsibilities of each organization or to devise any means of coordinating their activities.⁴³

Thompson's perspective represents a fundamental philosophy of how to approach intelligence. It remains a key part of how the British military view this essential component of warfare. Before analysing in detail two critical aspects of the UK intelligence effort in South Arabia, it is worth exploring the basic concepts and principles within British military intelligence.

Intelligence Theory and Principles

The intellectual and practical framework for military intelligence within the British military is “the intelligence cycle” (the Int Cycle). As a system, the efficacy of the structure, processes and outputs are a regular topic of discussion within the profession. Despite the lively debate about how to best optimise the cycle, it remains the accepted basis of how to approach the task of providing military intelligence support to military operations and the core concept taught in training.⁴⁴ Any assessment of the performance of military intelligence must account for this conceptual framework as it is highly likely to have at least informed, if not directed, the actions of all personnel within the intelligence apparatus in South Arabia from battalions responsible for securing Sheikh Othman District, to the Military Intelligence Officers (MIOs) in the AIC and the Staff Officers in Headquarters Middle East Command.

The intelligence cycle is a simple conceptual model for visualising how to deliver intelligence support to any hierarchical organization (such as the military). It comprises four sequential, but inter-related, stages in a circle: direction, collection, processing and dissemination. A brief exploration of each stage illustrates the range of skills required, the potential for friction and highlights the importance of unity of effort if not unity of command.

“Direction” comes from the overall commander with input from the commander’s intelligence advisor/officer. It can be verbal only but it must be developed into something clear, concise and focused so all in the organization understand not just what they are looking for but why and what decision it is intended to support. The latter does not mean telling the commander what he wants to hear: intelligence that confirms or denies an assumption and negates a possible course of action is just as valid as ‘good news’ that the enemy is bending to our will.

“Collection” is based on the priorities from the commander’s direction and is done by the intelligence agencies, organic military assets, and by soldiers on patrol in the area of operations. This stage must be controlled and tasked by the lead intelligence officer whose role is to ensure that the commander’s direction is translated into intelligence gathering operations that will address those priorities. Collection itself is a highly specialised skill with intensive training in technical or human collection methods.

“Processing” is the analytical and assessment stage where the information gathered in the collection stage is collated, analysed, evaluated and turned into some kind of useful product that provides improved un-

derstanding through insight or predictive assessment. Intelligence analysts also require thorough training in appropriate skills: as a minimum analysis and assessment but including the appropriate regional, political, cultural and religious context for that operational theatre if possible.

There is usually something of a cultural difference between those intelligence specialists whose field is processing compared to the collectors. The latter are generally more vulnerable to the threat of enemy action and have a perspective built around gathering intelligence from their sources (of whatever kind). The analysts who process that material are probably less familiar with local customs and practices as they do not have day-to-day contact with the local populace. However, by virtue of being the central point for all-source analysis they are best placed to have as objective a view as possible and therefore can construct the overall intelligence picture. They are less exposed to direct danger than most of the collectors but do experience their own pressure through direct exposure to those who receive the intelligence—often a tough, unforgiving audience.

Finally, “dissemination” is the stage where the hard work done at collection and processing does something useful as it is disseminated out of the intelligence apparatus to someone who will actually do something with it. The intelligence product may be a verbal brief, a map with a dot, a photograph with an arrow or a ninety page Top Secret Classified document—depending on the requirement and situation. The key issues are relevance and timeliness. Failure to meet both means failure for the entire Int Cycle. Once the disseminated material is received by the commander there should be fresh direction—even if the response is “same again” or “no change.” The intended model of the Int Cycle process is illustrated by the diagram in Figure 7.

The outputs from each stage are intended to be mutually supportive with the overall effect being a virtuous circle that can adapt to changes in overall direction from the commander, change speed or emphasis, depending on the evolving situation and mission. The risk is that if any one stage fails to deliver a decent quality output, perhaps in clarity or relevance, then the rest of the stages are affected and the overall process loses efficacy. A helpful metaphor used to describe some of the Clausewitzian friction common within the Int Cycle is “throwing sand in the engine.” All four stages run the risk of weaknesses and inefficiency that can ruin the entire effort. Here are some of the most common and a short summary of how well they were executed in the South Arabia campaign.

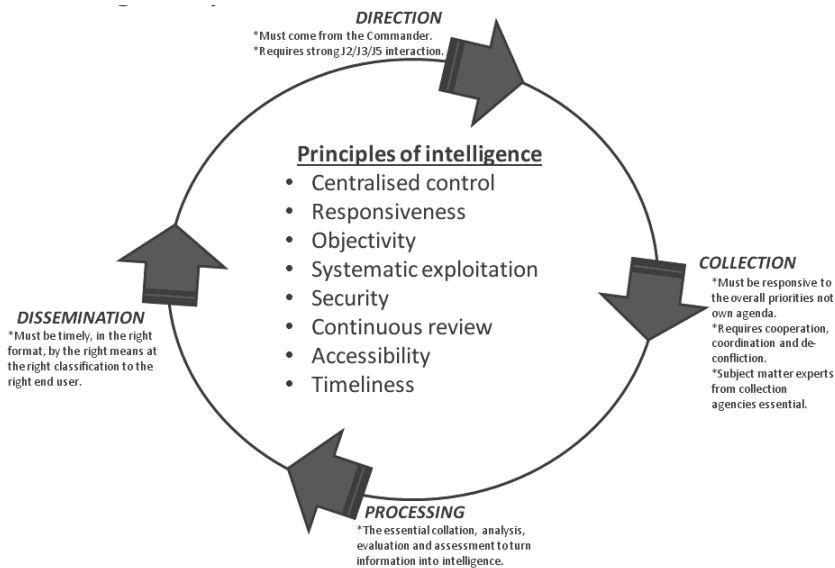


Figure 7. The British Army’s “Intelligence Cycle” Model.

Source: Created by Author.

For “direction” it is not unknown for commanders to make a simple mistake: to assume that their direction and priorities are clear to all and therefore to give no direction at all (this is the most common in the author’s experience). It is not unusual for commanders to simply expect their intelligence staff to write their Commander’s Critical Intelligence Requirements (CCIRs) and Priority Information Requirements (PIRs) for them. Under the British system, they should come from the commander’s mission analysis in the early stages of planning. Given that Commander’s direction is the foundation for the subsequent tasking of all assets to collect intelligence, it is not ideal for there to be any confusion over who the commander is or for there to be no clear leader of the intelligence community. In South Arabia, the slowness with which a “Security Commander” and Director of Intelligence was appointed reduced the performance of the intelligence apparatus just when the insurgency was showing its teeth.

For “collection”, the “sand in the engine” metaphor evokes the effect of lack of unity of effort has on the wider intelligence community. Unfortunately, in a world of institutional rivalry and competition for tight domestic budgets the spirit of cooperation amongst the agencies is sadly

absent. Throw in the presence of the army, and the Int Corps, and there is the potential for a room full of wailing banshees rather than a harmonious choir. In the case of South Arabia the British model struggled to adapt to the loss of the collection capability of Aden Special Branch and an over-reliance on interrogation to provide intelligence that could be used for operations against the NLF.

For “processing,” there are three common situations that often frustrate efficacy and efficiency. One, the marginalisation of the intelligence analysts so they are under-resourced, poorly-led and even ignored. Two, a lack of unity of effort amongst the intelligence agencies at the “collection” stage causing incomplete reporting and zero cooperation with the analysts responsible for turning the information collected into all-source intelligence. Three, poor quality analysts who are not well-trained in analysis and making assessments; this deficiency can also be compounded by analysts lacking awareness of the local environment (culture, terrain, people and their own army units) and the capabilities of the intelligence collection agencies. In South Arabia campaign, the material that survives suggests that lack of unity of effort and a poor understanding of the environment were both issues that frustrated the quality of intelligence produced by the AIC and the general lack of confidence in it as an organization. These failings were recognised as problems by contemporaries—particularly in the Prendergast Report, Oct 1965 into ‘Intelligence in Aden’—and are explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.

For “dissemination,” the failings of the previous stages of the Int Cycle are consolidated: whatever was directed, collected and processed is then provided to the “customer” that runs the cycle. In addition to cumulative failings, the dissemination stage can make matters worse by further failings: one, not sending the intelligence in a timely fashion (better 80 percent on time than 100 percent too late). Two, sending out a product in a format that is unusable for the intended audience. Three, sending the product at an inappropriate classification—both too restrictive so it cannot be read by a key customer or too open so there is a danger of compromising intelligence collection capabilities. In the South Arabia campaign, the challenge was to somehow disseminate timely intelligence that could be read by British Army units working closely with the security forces of the Federation of South Arabia but protect the process that was heavily reliant upon interrogation of captured personnel. “Releaseability” to security force mentors and local allies would prove just as tricky in Iraq and Afghanistan. This issue is explored further in chapter four.

Intelligence in South Arabia: the Challenge to Adapt

Admiral LeFanu and High Commissioner Sir Humphrey Trevelyan were ultimately the men who tasked, and were served, by the British intelligence organization in South Arabia. From a strictly military intelligence perspective, LeFanu was at the apex of the “Int Cycle”; his assessment of its efficacy must carry great weight in determining its performance. He found it inadequate. The above analysis of the British civilian and military organizations in the conflict shows that this was not a stagnant organization that made no attempt to change to overcome its adversary. Efforts were made by the Colonial Office, the military and the JIC to improve operations and intelligence—particularly in 1965 when the British faced a significant increase in violence from the insurgency and the new government in London grappled with the idea of a complete reversal in national policy and war aims.

Regardless of whether the British were following an exit strategy or a winning strategy, by early 1965 the intelligence community clearly had to change. Two aspects emerge as disproportionately important to improving the performance of intelligence: the ability to direct and task the collective intelligence organization (“centralized control”) and to exploit the available collection assets to the best of their ability (“systematic exploitation”). These two areas are now analysed in chapters three and four.

Notes

1. CO 1035 179, the 'Prendergast Report'. Declassified records from the Cabinet Office, the UK National Archive, Kew (formerly classified Top Secret).

2. Middle East Command, Supplement to Newsletter 6, 30 November 1967, paragraph 22. From DEFE 11/541, declassified records from the Ministry of Defence, the UK National Archive, Kew. Previously classified Secret, the document was the regular situation report from MEC. This was the final report to CDS and the rest of the UK military establishment written by Commander in Chief Middle East Forces Admiral LeFanu. It is fair to say LeFanu pulled few punches in his valedictory report.

3. For example, the Prendergast Report and surrounding correspondence within the Colonial Office and Ministry of Defence showed barely concealed frustration with Aden Special Branch and the AIC from February 1965 onwards. DEFE 11/541 and CAB 1035/179, Declassified records of the Ministry of Defence and Colonial Office, the UK National Archives, Kew.

4. For example, the UK retained a treaty obligation to the defence of Kuwait; the latter resulted in the deployment of British forces (maritime and land) to deter aggression anticipated from Iraq in July 1961. See Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy—y How the Joint Intelligence Committee saw the World*. London: John Murray, 2002. 202-209.

5. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 182, 185 on the cynical culture within the Foreign Office and the decision to recognise Republican Yemen.

6. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 132. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 224-225.

7. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 132.

8. For a description of the unique culture of the advisory system see Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 31-32. Its consequences in terms of lack of a formal intelligence apparatus in 1965—see CO 1035 179 'The Prendergast Report.'

9. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 166-181.

10. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 146.

11. CO 1035 179. JIC 'Intelligence organization in Aden and the Federation Working Party', 21 December 1965, declassified document of the Colonial Office, National Archive, Kew.

12. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, xix. Declassified intelligence documents from the period now available from the National Archive also carry redactions which are highly likely to have contained references to SIS and GCHQ reporting or operations.

13. For example, there is no mention of the conflict in Aden in Cradock, *Know your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee say the World* or in Nigel West, *GCHQ-The Secret Wireless War 1900-86*. London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1988. Nigel West, *The Friends: Britain's Post-War Secret Intelligence Operations*. London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1988.

14. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 125-126.

15. According to Cradock the higher priorities at the time were tracking threats across the wider Middle East (such as Iraq against Kuwait), the US war in

Vietnam and the potential for a Soviet-Chinese split and the ‘confrontation’ with Indonesia. Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, 161-210.

16. Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, 7-11.

17. For example, Cradock devotes extensive space to British crisis in the Area of Operations of Middle East Command—Kuwait and Rhodesia—but does not connect this with the conflict in South Arabia that was central to holding on to that very AO. Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, Chs 11-13.

18. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 185.

19. Private interview with Foreign Office source who served in South Arabia.

20. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 7. Trevaskis also noted the sub-standard performance of the Colonial Office in Aden where the officials had a complacent ‘transitory’ culture of using Aden as a stepping stone to another post elsewhere hence they were indifferent to local culture and needs. He contrasted that with the Agents in the Western Aden Protectorate who lived and breathed the local life.

21. Uri Bar Joseph, *Intelligence Intervention in the Politics of Democratic States: the United States, Israel and Britain*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 322-336, provides an excellent analysis of the peculiar culture within the British intelligence services that excluded individuals not from a right wing, elitist, public school background. Colloquially known as ‘the old boy’s network’, they are immortalized as a manipulative, but benign, elite in popular British culture through television programs such as ‘Yes Prime Minister’. However, the old boy’s network (those who went to the same public, i.e. private, schools followed by Oxford or Cambridge Universities) did manifest itself in more sinister ways. For example, Bar Joseph provides a detailed account of anti-government conspiracies in the 1920s when senior British military and intelligence figures tried to change British foreign policy and prevent the Labour Party from winning a General Election.

22. This ‘abandon Aden’ view was articulated in an appalling piece of official wishful thinking against better professional advice (including the Political Advisor to MEC, DJ McCarthy) was, “Outcome Of Defence Review: Aden Base”, PM SECRET, 16 Dec 1965 from the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee that argued the Egyptians and insurgents would stop killing British personnel if the UK made its policy reversal public as ‘there was no reason to keep attacking us’. The four-fold increase in violence showed that assessment to be deeply misguided. See CAB 148 49, declassified documents of the Cabinet Office, National Archive, Kew.

23. Richard Stubbs, “From search and destroy to hearts and minds: the evolution of British strategy in Malaya, 1948-60,” in COIN in *Modern Warfare*, eds. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010).

24. For an overview of the campaign that effectively defeated the “G-men” in Dublin, see Tim Pat, Coogan, *Michael Collins* (Dublin: Arrow Publishing, 1991).

25. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 141.

26. DEFE 11/541 and CAB 1035/178, Declassified records of the Ministry of Defence and Colonial Office, the UK National Archive, Kew.

27. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 184-185.

28. Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 1964-67. London: Faber and Faber, 1968, 113. Vitaly Naumkin, *Red Wolves of Yemen*. New York: The Oleander Press, 2004, 127.

29. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 122-123.

30. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 127.

31. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 115. For example, in 1964 there were 36 incidents recorded by the British security forces. In 1965 this had risen eightfold to 286 incidents.

32. As previously cited, High Commissioner Sir Kennedy Trevaskis was opposed to this kind of large-scale expedition. For a detailed breakdown of the resources expended see Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 110.

33. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 128.

34. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 131.

35. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 129; Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 130.

36. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 130-131.

37. The correspondence within the Colonial Office, and between it and other government departments in London, throughout 1965 shows the awareness of the poor state of intelligence in South Arabia. The outcome was a visit by Assistant Chief Constable Sir John Prendergast to Aden in October 1965 with 'the Prendergast Report' following in November 1965. It recommended a major reorganization of intelligence in South Arabia—including disbanding the AiC. This is covered in more detail in chapter 3.

38. There was a steady stream of Colonial Office memos on this topic in 1965—see CO 1035 178, Colonial Office, Internal Memo, J.D. Higham, 21 January 1965.

39. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 26. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 107-108.

40. For his outstanding history of the JIC see Sir Percy Cradock, *Know your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee saw the world* (London: John Murray, 2002).

41. For a critical appraisal of the membership of the LIC see declassified records of the Colonial Office, Sir John Prendergast, "Intelligence in Aden," Top Secret report to Colonial Secretary, 3, paragraph 8, available at CO 1035/178, UK National Archives, Kew.

42. DEFE 28 160. 'South Arabia Action Group: Report by Chairman and Deputy Chairman on their visit to South Arabia, 31 October to 12 November 1966,' 18 (paragraph 50), UK National Archive, Kew.

43. Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. 85.

44. See recent British doctrine on the theoretical concepts within military intelligence: JDN 1-10, *Understanding*, 2-3. The debate is about not seeing the utility of the Int Cycle as a mechanical process but instead seeing the four stages as 'core functions' of intelligence. Either way, no one seriously contests that those four things exist, are necessary, or should be viewed as a system.

Chapter 3

Intelligence Performance

Centralized Control

This selfish approach to information must be stamped out. The intelligence community must work together to one purpose.¹

—Sir John Prendergast

In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king.²

—Desiderius Erasmus

Discussion of the success of an intelligence organization can easily gravitate towards the more glamorous end of the intelligence process—collection. This is the world that involves clandestine techniques and special technology: the cultivation of enemy agents, use of “wire taps” on ‘suspects’ phones or covert surveillance of the enemy by undercover military operatives. Comparatively little time is spent in popular fiction, or academic works, on the equally essential activity of tired people working in poorly air-conditioned offices deliberating over lines of authority, reporting chains, the allocation of resources and the analytical process. However, it is absolutely essential for the effectiveness and efficiency of any intelligence organization to establish a sound structure for the intelligence process. Above all, a central figure to direct and control the intelligence organization must be established or the entire effort runs the risk of factionalism, inefficiency and irrelevance.

A sound structure should not be judged purely in terms of the intelligence being “right” or not. Intelligence gained on the enemy is highly likely to be more wrong than right on the very simple ground that intelligence work revolves around capturing information that an opponent is deliberately trying to conceal and then make predictions about future behaviour based on that incomplete understanding. It is better to view the soundness of the organizational structure by judging to what extent there is a clear chain of command capable of overseeing the collection, analysis and sharing of intelligence that is respected by both the intelligence community and their customers. It is this less exciting but absolutely critical area of centralized control (one of the eight principles of intelligence for the British Army at the time of the South Arabia conflict) that is the subject of this chapter.

What is “Centralized Control”?

From the 1960s to the most recent draft of British Army doctrine, “centralized control” is cited as an essential principle within the intelligence process; indeed, it was the first of the eight principles of intelligence. The purpose of centralized control is to ensure no duplication of effort, responsive of intelligence assets to the overall commander, and mutual support and efficiency between collection assets. For it to work it is imperative that the commander give clear direction and feedback to his intelligence team. It is also essential that he appoint and empower a clear leader to corral and control his intelligence organization. Hence, “centralized control.”

“Centralized control” is directing, controlling and reviewing the intelligence process to ensure it is effective and efficient. That may sound easy for an organization that is built on hierarchy and compliance, but, in practice it is often very difficult to achieve. It is a very difficult challenge to identify the best echelon at which to do so, the right person in whom to place the responsibility and then achieve consensus amongst the members of the intelligence community to work within the agreed framework. It can represent a threat to the civilian way of working that dislikes rigid authority, military working practices and minimises their opportunity to increase their agency’s funding through unilateral intelligence successes. For the military it can undermine the unity of command through the operational chain by placing a senior intelligence officer at the summit of an intelligence process that directly, or indirectly, interferes with the local commander’s direction of his intelligence team.

In the case of “CJTF BEAR,” the difficult question that is not addressed is who is providing direction to the collective intelligence organization and how is this being coordinated to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency. There is no mechanism in place within the military intelligence community for a senior intelligence officer accountable to the Commander who is able to marshal the resources and energies of the entire intelligence team. In short, who is the boss that directs the Int Cycle and how is the collective intelligence process controlled to ensure minimal duplication of effort and common understanding? The unfortunate answer is that in practice it is not entirely clear.

An example of a common type of Combined Joint Task Force that generates this kind of centralized control issue is provided by the [diagram at Figure 8](#).

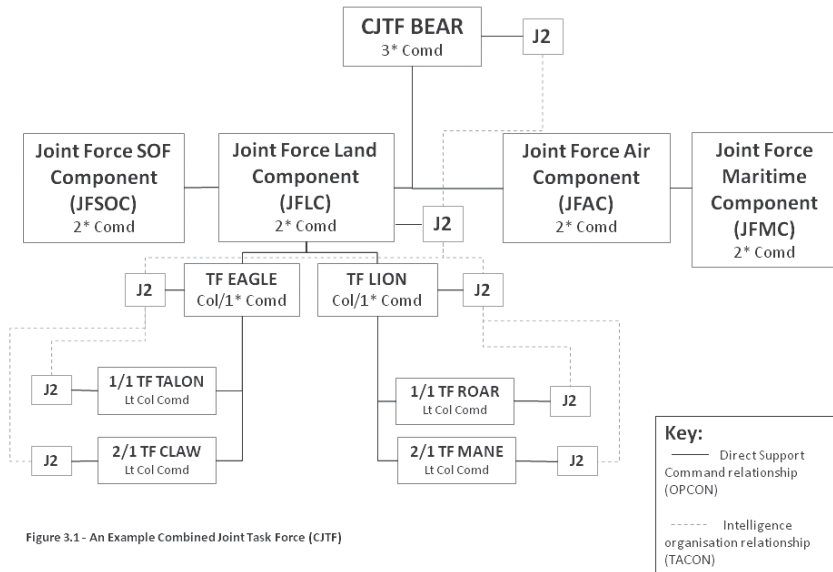


Figure 3.1 - An Example Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)

Figure 8. An Example of a Combined Joint Task Force with Supporting J2 Elements.

Source: Created by Author.

In the absence of centralized control and a common framework there is little chance of developing a coherent common intelligence picture—particularly in a COIN campaign. Even with a common doctrine, each unit is likely to interpret the intelligence process, and its local environment, differently. The output will be erratic as different databases, spellings and information management systems frustrate analysis, finding common links and sound assessments. So, although a Director of Chief of Intelligence goes against the grain of each TF Commander ‘owning’ their J2 team there is value in a degree of centralisation to ensure coherence across the intelligence community.

Why Have “Centralized Control?”

Aside from the inherent military benefits of knowing who you work for, their authority over you and who you are supporting, it is worth considering the wider benefits of taking an approach to intelligence that begins with “centralized control.” There are six reasons why “centralized control” is critical to a sound intelligence organization.

One, it provides a way of correctly allocating scarce intelligence resources based on the overall commander's priorities. This sounds easy but is a major challenge. It is doubtful if there has ever been a commander who felt he had too many intelligence assets or too great an understanding of the enemy or the operating environment. It is highly likely that every campaign will have insufficient intelligence resources to achieve the level of clarity that is sought. By placing the commander at the central focus for the intelligence organization, and ensuring that it is in turn centrally controlled by his lead intelligence officer, the commander at least has a fighting chance of shaping the intelligence battle to meet his needs.

Two, it provides the best opportunity to flexibly employ intelligence collection assets based on enemy vulnerabilities, friendly strengths and the demands of the commander's evolving operational approach. The alternative is to allocate out intelligence assets on a "fair" basis to subordinate tactical commanders who, by definition, are not able to see the bigger operational picture. If the intelligence collection assets are allocated out equally, then they will be less than the sum of their parts. For example, electronic warfare (EW) collection assets could be deployed to the lowest tactical level in a COIN campaign where the enemy uses handheld radios as communication devices. At the tactical level the EW assets add great value by providing local commanders of immediate warnings of enemy attacks against their patrols and bases. However, the overall ability to use all electronic warfare as an intelligence collection tool to identify enemy activity and thereby map the entire enemy communications network is lost. Centralized control enables the overall commander to decide which approach to take—and when to change—depending on his priorities and the situation.

Three, centralized control provides a focal point for agreeing lines of authority between national intelligence agencies, local allies and the military intelligence community and common working practices that can then be established throughout the force. In a JIIM environment binding formal agreements at the most senior level in the operational theatre are essential to ensure all participants work in unison and within the correct legal framework. Once these thorny issues are addressed the subject matter experts from all disciplines can focus on their own work rather than continually argue over what they are legally allowed to share with each other or collect in the field. The benefit of doing this at the most senior level in theatre is that it becomes inherently tied to the overall commander who is the best person to balance the national policy and legal issues with the urgent requirements of the operation. After all, that is why he is there. If left to the heads of agencies back in the US or UK it is much more likely

that a risk-averse compromise will be reached that does not truly meet the needs of the campaign.

Four, centralized control provides the most suitable vehicle for understanding and responding to the enemy in a COIN campaign. In COIN it is highly likely the insurgents will be supported by an external agent and will cross individual unit boundaries and international borders as a matter of course. An intelligence organization that is controlled at the highest practical level is best placed to detect, understand and track these trends. Dissipation of intelligence assets is more likely to miss the wider pattern and prevents the overall commander from doing much about it as his subordinate commanders “own” their J2 assets.

Five, centralized control plays to the strength of existing military and civilian cultures that all tend to embrace, or at least accept, a strong leader—be that the Ambassador, High Commissioner, or the CJTF Commander. Centralized control emphasises that overall leader’s authority over the intelligence community and their active role as ultimate “owner” of the Int Cycle for the campaign. In short, it compels that leader to take responsibility for intelligence and not subcontract it out his intelligence experts; as the previous chapter on the Int Cycle showed, the experts require a leader to own the intelligence process or they will struggle to deliver the best material possible. For example, it was noticeable in Iraq the time spent by General Petraeus during regular briefings on intelligence. It was not uncommon for him to spend an hour of a 3-4 hour briefing listening to, and questioning, intelligence before going on to hear from subordinate commanders on the situation in their areas. With this level of scrutiny it was clear how important intelligence was to his campaign as well as who owned it.³

Six, centralized control improves the performance of J2 analytical personnel within the intelligence structures by allowing them to work together in mutually supportive teams based upon skills, expertise and task. The nature of analytical work in the intelligence community is that it genuinely benefits from having the perspective of more than one analyst (but not too many). By putting analysts from different areas in the same analysis cell there is more rigorous analysis and cross-fertilisation of ideas as personnel inevitably look at each other’s work, scrutinise their ideas and see patterns in reporting and enemy activity. This is the essence of intelligence work; it is labelled “Fusion” in contemporary US and UK forces but was thought of in the past simply as all-source intelligence analysis.⁴

A final point, centralized control does not mean that all intelligence personnel and assets are held at the operational level with nothing supporting the formations at the tactical level. It must not be centralized control

and centralized execution. That would be a very dangerous: everything would sit at the top of the ivory tower providing flawed assessment ignorant of tactical realities and dangerously exposing tactical units. To go back to the hypothetical example of “CJTF BEAR,” the J2 teams exist at all levels to provide “Close Support” by conducting intelligence collection, analysis and assessment to their formation. The key point is the empowering of the J2 team supporting HQ CJTF BEAR with responsibility for allocating intelligence resources to the subordinate J2 teams and giving them overall direction as required. That leaves scope for the subordinate commanders to own the assets that have been allocated to them (but knowing that allocation is subject to external review) and set the local priorities for their J2 team. The challenge is then for the overall J2 at CJTF BEAR to give direction without micromanagement and for the subordinate “Close Support” J2 teams at TF LION, TF EAGLE etc. to balance supporting their local commander and the overall intelligence effort. The extent to which the British were able to address this issue reveals the difficulty they had in overcoming their weakening position in South Arabia and the difficulty in changing an unsound intelligence structure when the enemy has the initiative.

“Centralized Control” and the British Response to the NLF

Centralized control and unity of effort were not achieved in the South Arabia campaign but they were recognised as key issues by those involved. It was the subject of much debate at the highest levels in the UK and South Arabia in 1965 as the British grappled with the losses suffered at the hands of the NLF and struggled to adapt. However, who was the leader responsible for the campaign and giving direction to the intelligence organization?

Within South Arabia, there were three key customers who needed to be supported by the intelligence machine. First, the High Commissioner who was the political supremo for the campaign. Second, General Officer Commanding Middle East Land Forces who from June 1965 was appointed the “Security Commander” with operational command of the forces engaged in the Emergency.⁵ Third, the Commander Middle East Command who was ultimately the most senior military leader in the theatre and responsible to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for the entire Middle East Area of Operations and the South Arabian Campaign.

In South Arabia, the British maintained distinct but mutually supporting civilian political and military domains that were coordinated through a committee structure; the campaign did not become subject to pure military

leadership—a whole of government approach was attempted.⁶ However, there was an underlying difference of views of those in theatre that sought to keep the political and security domains separate in intelligence terms.

Regardless of the strategy being pursued by the counter-insurgent, few would argue that the separation of politics and security is anything other than a serious structural error when the adversary you are trying to defeat sees those same domains as two sides of the same coin. The counter-insurgent must recognise that the enemy is pursuing political subversion through violence; taking an approach that does not unify your own actions in those areas risks generating a poor understanding of the enemy and incoherence in your own strategy. This rift is revealed in the debate over how to address the ineffective intelligence organization.

There were four individuals, and posts, who were central to this debate:

1. Sir John Prendergast a leading figure in the post-WWII intelligence and Special Branch world with an outstanding reputation from Cyprus and Kenya.⁷
2. D.J. McCarthy political advisor (POLAD) to Commander MEC and later Head of the Arabian Department of the Foreign Office.
3. Major-General M. St. J. Oswald the Director of Military Intelligence in Whitehall.
4. A/Brigadier AW (Tony) Cowper the Director/Chief of Intelligence in Aden prior to the arrival of Sir John Prendergast as the new Director of Intelligence in July 1966.⁸

Their discussions must have been vigorous in person as the language used in the surviving British documentation is unusually warm and colourful.

The report that brought to a head the entire issue of the effectiveness of the intelligence apparatus in South Arabia was Assistant Chief Constable Sir John Prendergast's "Review of Aden Intelligence." It was classified Top Secret and disseminated to a tightly controlled audience in Whitehall and South Arabia in November 1965. The report was written following Prendergast's visit to Aden in October 1965 after a prolonged internal bureaucratic exchange within the Colonial Office gained his temporary release from his duties as Head of Special Branch in Hong Kong. Prendergast recommended a thorough reorganization of intelligence in Aden under an increasingly empowered Chief of Intelligence and the reinvigoration of Special Branch, anti-insurgent targeting and exploitation of captured detainees. In short, take the principles, and experiences, from Cyprus, Kenya and Malaya and employ them within South Arabia but within the context of the unique challenges of that environment.

The Prendergast Report was followed by reports from the JIC Working Party on Intelligence in Aden and South Arabia. There was much agreement on the underlying factors that were frustrating the development of an effective intelligence organization in South Arabia. However, the perspectives from current CoI Brigadier Cowper and the POLAD DJ McCarthy presented alternative prescriptions for change in South Arabia that are unlikely to have pleased Prendergast. Nevertheless, all were agreed: adaptation and change was essential for the UK to have any hope of success in South Arabia.

External Scrutiny and Change: The Prendergast Report

By the standards of any time, the Prendergast Report is impressively direct and blunt in its analysis and prescriptive in its recommendations for change. The report itself was addressed directly to the Secretary for the Colonies; he was the Cabinet level figure responsible for South Arabia and the direct superior of the High Commissioner. It was sixteen pages long and concluded with a list of seventeen specific recommendations for immediate actions to change the intelligence organization and four page annex providing standing instructions for the Head of Special Branch.⁹ The language used to describe the existing state of the intelligence organization in South Arabia was “full and frank” to use that wonderful euphemism from fictional Whitehall mandarin Sir Humphrey Appleby in *Yes Prime Minister*.¹⁰ To use more plain language, it was brutal, unambiguous criticism that could only come from an outsider not responsible for the current predicament and with an outstanding professional reputation. His opening salvo covered the entire culture of the intelligence organization in South Arabia in very tough terms:

One of the first impressions I gained after my arrival in Aden was that the intelligence community lacked energy and purpose. There was no sense of urgency and far too much “nine to five” attitude to the tasks in hand. Worse still there was little or no cohesion and no team effort.¹¹

It may seem harsh but this is an organization that was over eighteen months into the Emergency and suffered fourteen fatalities to its Arab Special Branch detectives. In that light it is not difficult to share Prendergast’s frustration at the tone of the organization, its lack of unity of effort and to understand his desire to see the culture change as the first step towards reform.

Prendergast moved on to note the lack of centralized control within the intelligence community and cited the marginalisation of the Chief of Intelligence (at this stage A/Brigadier Cowper) as a key failing in the existing organization:

There was a tendency on the part of many to keep their intelligence cards too close to their chests instead of declaring the material they had to the right quarter—the Chief of Intelligence (CoI). This selfish approach to intelligence must be stamped out. The intelligence community must work together and to one purpose and the Chief of Intelligence must be placed in possession of all security intelligence material. He is there as the collator and assessor of such intelligence.¹²

Prendergast went on to explain his concept of how the Chief of Intelligence should operate in a COIN campaign and the importance of unity of effort within the intelligence community:

Experience elsewhere has repeatedly shown, especially under emergency conditions, that it is essential that there be one person who sees the whole intelligence picture and one desk to which all intelligence material affecting the security of the area in question is directed. This has not been achieved in Aden. The Chief of Intelligence is not being used as he should be, even by the Local Intelligence Committee (LIC) and too frequently he is being bypassed by those very agencies and officials which have a responsibility to help him.¹³

This is a ringing endorsement of the principle of centralized control and unity of effort within the intelligence community; however, Prendergast's solution was not to create a structure that was even more centralized. He recognised the failings of the existing intelligence organization which, after all, already had an AIC that in theory should have been the perfect vehicle for the Chief of Intelligence to fulfil the central role that Prendergast argued was essential.

Prendergast's view of the AIC made his thoughts on the complacent and selfish culture within the intelligence community seem mild by comparison. His analysis of the AIC was:

it was presumably meant to be a focal point for all intelligence on Aden State and the Protectorate. If the Center ever did play its role to the full it is certainly not doing so now. I formed the

impression that in present circumstances and particularly looking to the future it would do well to look to its disbandment.¹⁴

In the concluding section of his report, his final recommendation was equally clear: “That immediate consideration be given to the disbandment of the AIC.”¹⁵

The context of his remarks is essential: Prendergast is giving a failing grade to the very organization that was designed and intended to provide intelligence for the British campaign in the Emergency. By stating so clearly that it was a failure it was by implication damning the British effort to date as inadequate and ineffective—strong words for an audience in Whitehall that was unlikely to welcome negative news.

Prendergast’s solution to restructuring the intelligence organization was not to reinforce the failed central structure of the AIC. He maintained that centralized control and unity of effort were critical but instead of investing in the current architecture advocated a new structure altogether. His solution was for centralized control, or at least supervision and analysis, but decentralized execution based on the geographical areas consistent with political boundaries and the actual ability collect intelligence. It placed the Chief of Intelligence at the center of the intelligence organization but restructured the framework and working practices to recognise what was currently missing and required substantial improvement. See Figure 9 for a diagram that explains Prendergast’s analysis of the situation in November 1965 and suggestions for change.

When conceiving his idea for a new intelligence organization, Prendergast noted four key issues with the status quo: one, trying to have an Int Cycle for the whole of South Arabia was not working but there was intelligence flowing in three separate areas that could yet be harnessed; two, create new intelligence organizations to support the EAP and Federation; two, rehabilitate Special Branch as an independent organization and focus it on intelligence in Aden State; four, get the Chief of Intelligence out of the office and into the country to supervise and guide the whole enterprise.

Prendergast identified that little intelligence was reaching the British authorities in Aden but that there was valuable intelligence material coming from within the EAP and Federal Government area but did not reach the AIC or Chief of Intelligence. Consequently, he noted the requirement to develop new intelligence organizations for the EAP and Federal Government separate from the AIC:

It is clear that most of the intelligence derived from or affecting the Protectorate is reaching Al Ittihad. I would therefore suggest that the Protectorate Intelligence entity now house in the

AIC be transferred to Al Ittihad...likewise I suggest that consideration be given to centring Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP) on Mukalla.¹⁶

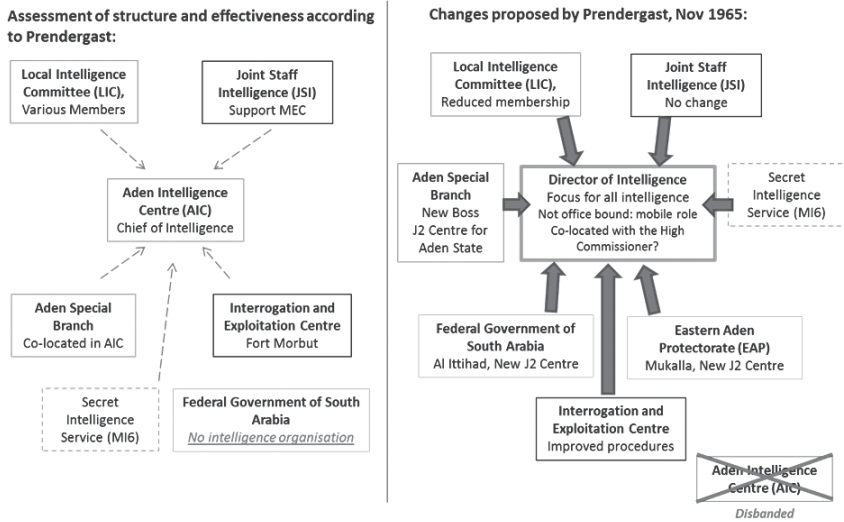


Figure 9. Prendergast’s Assessment of Intelligence Organization in South Arabia and Proposal for Change, November, 1965.

Source: Created by Author.

Prendergast spent a great deal of time focusing on how to resurrect the Special Branch following the dreadful casualties amongst its Arab officers and replacement by well-meaning but non-Arabist British expatriate officers. His main suggestion from an operational intelligence perspective was that by separating out SB from the AIC the latter can rediscover its true role as the primary organization for intelligence within Aden State:

If this decentralisation is achieved, it would in my view be advantageous if the AIC title was allowed to disappear. This would make way for the proper identification of Special Branch as Aden’s own intelligence organization. I cannot help but feel that the placing of Special Branch under the umbrella of the AIC has to some degree hampered the development of the former.¹⁷

Prendergast identified the immediate benefits of retaining the Chief of Intelligence as the central figure in the overall intelligence organization but unfixing him from Aden and the mechanics of the production process. His intent was to thereby free up the Chief of Intelligence to have greater travel around the operational theatre improve his overall understanding through context and situational awareness:

It is however, essential that all concerned with security in Aden State and the Protectorate should ensure that the Chief of Intelligence at all times has the fullest possible intelligence picture. I would suggest that to this end the Chief of Intelligence should travel about the area, particularly the Protectorate, far more than he does at present. He should meet the people who provide intelligence on their own ground. He must try to divest himself of involvement in the day to day production of intelligence and by more personal contact in the field provide himself with background knowledge against which to judge the material he receives. I feel that there is a vast amount of information cum intelligence lying fallow which he could probably tap for himself and which would help him in his overall task as the main collator and assessor of local security intelligence.¹⁸

Prendergast did address the likely criticism that disbanding the AIC reduced centralized control. In his view that was a fair observation in theory, but his recommendation was still valid in practice as the benefits that would be accrued from basing intelligence structures on three geographical areas that intelligence was actually collecting in—the Federation, EAP and Aden State—but was not making it back to the AIC outweighed the loss of the ineffective AIC. He also noted that a more effective decentralized system actually improved the position of the Chief of Intelligence to fulfil his role as the senior figure within the intelligence organization providing centralized control through overall assessment, guidance and supervision:

It may be felt that the above proposals are opposed to the basic principle of centralising intelligence on one desk. This is not in fact so because the C. of I. would remain the center point of all intelligence material affecting the Protectorate and Aden State. The difficulty in centralising the producing agencies arises from the fact that there are three somewhat differing types of intelligence involved and three separate areas affected. While it is true that they are all inter-related there are three center points into which the intelligence from the respective areas naturally

flows—Aden, Al Ittihad and Mukalla. The material converging on these three points can and must meet eventually on the desk of the C. of I.¹⁹

There is a slightly enigmatic section in the Prendergast report covering the relationship between “Political Affairs Staff (PAS) and the Special Branch”. Prendergast makes the following observation:

There is in my view a great deal to be gained from a closer relationship between the PAS and Head of Special Branch. I hope that under the new regime in Special Branch a greater trust and understanding between the two agencies will be developed. This is particularly necessary if full advantage is to be taken of the resources of both organizations in tackling such important targets as the National Liberation Front’s HQ in Taiz and the Egyptian Intelligence Service (EIS)...I was much heartened to hear during my visit that the PAS are now treating this as a primary target. The penetration of the Taiz HQ would be a tremendous advantage and would probably be the biggest step forward in the fight against the NLF. Therefore this must be the main objective of the combined efforts of the PAS and Aden Special Branch.²⁰

At first glance “PAS” appears to be a reference to the many Political Agents from the Colonial Office sent on their own into the Sheikdoms of the WAP and EAP but lacking any intelligence support staff. However, from the context of how Prendergast sees their relationship with Aden Special Branch developing, and from the presence of redacted words from the section, it is more likely to be a euphemism for SIS personnel and operations. The key area that Prendergast envisages as improving is the liaison between “PAS” and SB personnel in a joint campaign to target the EIS, the NLF and their HQ in Taiz, Yemen. That is much more consistent with intelligence sharing between covert members of SIS in South Arabia and any CT team set up within Aden SB than the relationship between overt Colonial Office Political Agents and SB. Either way it underlines Prendergast’s recognition of the importance of unity of effort, centralized control and cooperation within the intelligence community.

For all the foresight in the above proposals, Prendergast did not address other key questions: with the AIC disbanded where was the Chief of Intelligence located when not roving about the country drawing on “fallow” intelligence? Secondly, was the Chief of Intelligence to have his own staff or plug in somewhere else? How would that fit in with the LIC and

JSI? For that matter, what should the framework for the new intelligence organization look like? Overall, it was a good plan but Prendergast's report required as much detail in how to adapt the non-Special Branch areas as was spent answering what Special Branch needed to do. The latter took up eight out of seventeen pages of the entire report.

The bias towards Special Branch is understandable given Prendergast's current employment as a Deputy Commissioner of Police and Director of Special Branch in Hong Kong but nevertheless regrettable in terms of producing a more balanced and thorough report. Prendergast's view of the importance of Special Branch has much merit given its strong performance in other colonial conflicts. However, his neglect of the details on how the rest of the intelligence organization should be restructured reduced its utility. Although a slightly defeatist idea, it may also have been useful to consider an alternative plan if it proved impossible to resuscitate the Special Branch. For all the merits of his professional appraisal, there were opponents within the British system who made it their business to prevent an empowered Director of Intelligence from achieving centralized control.

Dissenting Views: The 'Political Advisor'

The surviving record does not give a clear account of what followed Prendergast's report. However, it appears to have been a period of urgent introspection as D.J. McCarthy, the Political Advisor to the Commander in Chief of Middle East Command, returned to London to give his input to the JIC in December 1965 just weeks after the Prendergast report hit Whitehall. The political advisor's contribution was delivered in person and written up as a six page Top Secret report with tight circulation in Whitehall. McCarthy was in a difficult position: he could not claim Prendergast was flat out wrong with his assessment as the latter had so much professional credibility throughout the British administration. Nor could he wholeheartedly endorse Prendergast's report in its entirety as it indirectly criticised him, and the other political advisors, for not fully supporting the Chief of Intelligence. McCarthy's response was a masterful piece of obfuscation that embraced Prendergast's overall assessment of the intelligence organization while subtly arguing against centralized control and unity of effort.

McCarthy's assessment of the state of the British intelligence organization in South Arabia is even blunter than the harsh words within Prendergast's report:

Intelligence Organization in Aden—Background. The Federation is at most three years away from independence. The British machine, as opposed to Arabised British, is ramshackle and running down and lacks most elements of normal infrastructure....The successor Arab administrative machine barely exists yet. There is no intelligence machine, properly speaking, covering and targeting the Protectorate. The nearest thing to an intelligence service is Special Branch, which is confined to Aden State, which was gravely weakened by assassinations and which, because of these assassinations and through intimidation of the populace, is receiving far less than the normal flow of information.²¹

There are two critical differences between McCarthy and Prendergast: one, McCarthy denies any obstruction or lack of support for the Chief of Intelligence; two, he denies it is possible to have a centralized intelligence organization in South Arabia.

McCarthy makes a substantial effort to deny the accusation that the Chief of Intelligence was undermined by a lack of unity of effort within the intelligence and political community. On three separate occasions McCarthy specifically denies that the Chief of Intelligence has not been supported by the various agencies and political advisors:

He himself [Brigadier Cowper the Chief of Intelligence] feels that his failure has been due to obstruction by others. In this he is over-rigid. He would have done better to realise that his charter was wrong.²²

Followed by:

I think he [Prendergast] has accepted too readily the views of the Chief of Intelligence in insisting that the Chief of Intelligence must, as in the JIC Paper of 1964, be the center of everything and in alleging personal obstruction.²³

And finally:

Major-General Oswald's report seems to be much more balanced. My only criticism is that he, again, appears to labour personal obstruction beyond what the facts warrant.²⁴

It is not possible to give a definitive answer on who was blocking who. However, if three non-Political Advisors all concurred that the Chief of Intelligence was not receiving the necessary reporting on political matters

it is hard to envision them all being wrong. McCarthy may have been defensive about this issue for personal reasons. It is highly likely that part of his role as Political Advisor to Commander MEC was to include the Chief of Intelligence in this material. His above statements were effectively denying his own obstructionism!

The recommendations from McCarthy on the role of the Chief of Intelligence are in stark contrast to Prendergast's views on centralized control and the value of all-source intelligence analysis in one location. McCarthy begins by explaining that political intelligence currently does not go anywhere near the Chief of Intelligence in the AIC:

It is outside the mainstream of political reporting and discussion. It would take a major effort of distribution, of additional staff and additional paper and so on to bring it into the main stream. The resources to do this are not available. I do not think it is even worth trying to make them available. By the time the AIC has been put into a position to do the work it was conceived as doing (if possible which I doubt) independence would be on us. After independence it has no future whatsoever.²⁵

What a wonderful insight into the mind of a political advisor assessing intelligence. Never mind the previous experience of Malaya, Cyprus and Kenya that highlighted the essential importance of a sound intelligence structure under an empowered Chief of Intelligence. In South Arabia, it was apparently just not worth the effort. McCarthy then flat out states that it is not possible for the Chief of Intelligence to do his job as the center of the intelligence organization and that his remit from the JIC is wrong:

I think the Chief of Intelligence's charter is one that he cannot be expected to live up to. His performance so far illustrates the point. He has done a good job in reconstructing the beginnings of an effective Special Branch after the Special Branch had been shattered by killings, the drying up of information and demoralisation. He has done a first rate job in getting effective interrogation going (although the part of the Army in this must not be overlooked). He has not been able to do much about political, as opposed to security, intelligence.²⁶

McCarthy's comments are egregious when compared to the very good case Prendergast makes when recommending an improved relationship between the Political Affairs Staff (PAS) and Aden Special Branch as a method of improving targeting of the NLF.

Following his denial of lack of support for the Chief of Intelligence and impossibility of centralized control, McCarthy goes even further by undermining Prendergast's professional expertise. McCarthy asserts that "security intelligence" and "other intelligence" are two separate domains; however, he does not define what they are but has a good crack at using them to undermine Prendergast's credibility anyway:

I think Mr Prendergast's report would be more telling if he had distinguished clearly between Security Intelligence and other Intelligence. Where he is dealing with the former, e.g. over Special Branch, he seems to be dead right and I am not in any case qualified to comment. Where he deals with the latter I think he has accepted too readily the views of the Chief of Intelligence....I see no signs that Mr Prendergast has even noticed the inherent landscape for central intelligence which I have discussed above.²⁷

McCarthy implies that Prendergast is out of his depth yet admits he has not even read his report when he makes his (lengthy) comments to the JIC! If he had, he would have realised that Prendergast noticed exactly the same "landscape" as McCarthy but had come to a different conclusion—to change the existing structure to make centralized control effective rather than abandon it as too difficult. McCarthy's attitude is probably a sign of instinctive defensiveness over his own role in marginalising the existing Chief of Intelligence. It is interesting to note that their two reports concur on much—setting up a proper intelligence structure for the Protectorate, disbanding the AIC—yet McCarthy remains resistant to greater unity of effort and centralized control.

The observations from McCarthy probably carried substantial weight in Whitehall; he had been Political Advisor to Commander MEC for several years and must have built up considerable professional capital in the bureaucracy. However, he was neither a police officer nor intelligence professional. It is odd that the JIC would regurgitate his views on keeping "political" and "security" intelligence separate with so little scrutiny or comment.

Different Emphasis: The Military Professionals

In addition to the reports from Prendergast and McCarthy there was formal input to the JIC from at least two members of the army both involved in intelligence: Major General Oswald, DMI, and A/Brigadier Cowper, Chief of Intelligence in Aden. Unfortunately the report from the

former does not seem to have been preserved in the records. However, from references in the McCarthy report it appears Oswald was not content with the situation and advocated that a Counter-Intelligence Unit be set-up in the “Federal Forces”—presumably as Oswald recognised the threat of NLF infiltration of the FRA.²⁸

Cowper was called back to Whitehall for consultations and appears in the surviving documentation as having his say with the JIC’s “Working Party on Intelligence in Aden and the Federation” on 22 April 1966; this is approximately two months before he relinquished responsibility as Chief of Intelligence to Sir John Prendergast.²⁹ It is likely there was a degree of personal protection going on as Cowper tried to defend his own record and encourage the JIC to set terms of reference for Prendergast that fitted Cowper’s own agenda as the latter was not leaving theatre but continuing on in a subordinate role to Prendergast.

After pointing out the positive steps he had already taken, Cowper recognised the importance of developing the intelligence capability in the EAP and the Federation. However, he disagreed with Prendergast’s prescription of breaking up the AIC and sending out the staff to set up intelligence cells in those areas—even if the situation deteriorated further:

If there was trouble in the EAP it might be necessary to send a Military Intelligence Officer to Muktalla, but it was not possible for intelligence on the EAP to be processed by Federal Government Staff at Al Ittihad. The AIC must therefore be the central link covering the whole of South Arabia. On the whole, therefore, it seemed that no major change in the central organization of intelligence was needed before independence.³⁰

Looking beyond the likely concern Cowper had for his impending replacement as Chief of Intelligence by Prendergast, it is significant that Cowper did not support McCarthy’s concept of separation of “political” and “security” intelligence. In fact, in his opening remarks he re-emphasised the importance of the Chief of Intelligence being fully included in this area of reporting:

Although arrangements for the circulation of telegrams of general political interest with a bearing on intelligence had been greatly improved there were still occasions on which the Chief of Intelligence did not see all such telegrams.³¹

Cowper’s professional disagreement with Prendergast over centralized control and the overall intelligence process was over how best to structure the organization not over whether or not it was possible or desirable to

have an integrated and centrally-led intelligence apparatus. This conclusion is important as it suggests that the late appointment of a Director of Intelligence in Aden, and the generally poor intelligence organization, was an aberration in the British experience and not done by design.

Summary

Centralized Control and Intelligence in South Arabia

It is tempting to sum up the British attempts at changing their intelligence organization with a degree of scorn over the lack of urgency with which the British state in Whitehall approached reform in South Arabia. The surviving correspondence from the Colonial Office shows that the visit, assessment and report of Sir John Prendergast took from February to November 1965 to organise and execute.³² In that time, the NLF had subverted the British position in the Federation and gained the ascendancy in Aden through a very effective terrorist campaign against Special Branch. The fact that Prendergast himself noted a similar complacency in the “nine to five” mentality of those working in the AIC when he visited in October 1965 is even worse as those members of staff are themselves in harm’s way and have lost colleagues killed to the NLF. Similarly, the attempt by McCarthy to frustrate Prendergast’s attempts at a thorough overhaul of the entire intelligence organization suggests a lack of understanding of the principles and methods that had proved successful in other British campaigns. How could this happen when the campaigns that preceded and followed South Arabia showed that the British were capable of learning and adapting? This issue is explored in detail in chapter five.

Centralized Control Wider Implications for Intelligence

There are three key issues from the British attempt at developing a centrally controlled intelligence apparatus that have wider implications for fighting and winning a COIN campaign. One, understand the nature of the war you are in as soon as you can; if you are in a COIN fight and/or a civil war then so be it—better to recognise that fact and try to win rather than deny there is a problem and hope for the best. Two, once you have done so, do not be coy or weak—make the bold changes that experience suggests must be made regardless of how upsetting that is for bureaucratic agendas, Service rivalry and people’s careers. Only through inter-agency consensus will unity of effort and centralized control be achieved. If you do not do so then you have little hope of achieving the levels of effectiveness and efficiency required to prevail in that kind of environment. Three, make sure

your political masters have the right expectations of what you can achieve and what is near impossible i.e. nothing if you are not perceived publically to be staying for the long term, little if you have no intelligence structure in half the country, and, absolutely nothing if the local population will not talk to you and your intelligence community will not work together.

Centralized Control Wider Implications Beyond Intelligence

Outside the British military intelligence community “centralized control” is not a commonly used term; however, it is essentially the same as unity of command or at least “unity of effort.” In the contemporary US military community the “joint, inter-agency, multinational” domain (“the JIIM”) is recognised as a central part of how military operations are conducted in the modern world. The challenge for adapting military hierarchies and command relationships to include these new, non-military organizations is being addressed.

A key concept that is aligned with “centralized control” is “unity of effort.” It recognises that with many different organizations coming together it is not necessarily possible (or even desirable in some situations) to have unity of command under a military figure. In its stead, “unity of effort” is the way ahead to at least achieve effectiveness (high quality output) if not efficiency (best value of output for resources spent in the process).

In the UK “unity of effort” in this sense finds its counterpart in the well-known concept of “the comprehensive approach.” This concept is very familiar to US COIN theorists and defence personnel as is the hard-won experience that it is easier to talk about than put into practice. A comprehensive approach or coordinated government machinery has been a principle of British COIN operations for many years before recent operational experience caused the lesson to be re-learned.³³ However, the significance of centralized control and unity of effort goes beyond the intelligence world and COIN theory. If methods of consensus building and working practices can be agreed within the intelligence community (and the latter is inherently a JIIM entity based on its diverse membership) then there may be lessons in achieving unity of effort and a comprehensive approach for the wider military and governmental community.

The same challenge exists in the contemporary British and US military and civilian intelligence communities. From the surviving documentation from the South Arabian campaign the issue of centralized control and unity of effort is a perennial challenge inherent to intelligence organizations and is not an anomaly. Examining how contemporaries grappled with this challenge provides some insights into the consequences of bu-

reaucratic resistance, lack of prioritisation and not understanding the nature of the war you are fighting—or at least not quickly enough.

The next chapter analyses the equally difficult problem of successfully exploiting an intelligence source once it has been identified—in the case of the South Arabian campaign the intelligence gained from interrogation. The latter proved to be difficult to do as an intelligence task and was made even more problematic by the strategic context of accusation of torture and international political pressure.

Notes

1. CO 1035/179, 'the Prendergast Report,' November 1965, declassified records of the Colonial Office, available at the UK National Archives, Kew.
2. Desiderius Erasmus, *Proverbs: Chiefly Taken from the Adagia of Erasmus, with Explanations; and Further Illustrated by Corresponding Examples from the Spanish, Italian, French & English Languages*, Vol. 2 (Ulan Press, 2011).
3. Author's own experience, Iraq, Summer 2008.
4. Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual (FM) 2-0, *Intelligence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2012), 5; British Army Field Manual (AFM), Volume 1, Part 10, *Counter-Insurgency Operations* (London: Ministry of Defence, January 2010), 5-5.
5. 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, 1991), 157. "Operational Executive-Minutes of the 5th meeting held at 10:30am Saturday 15 May 1965 at the Security Secretariat," CO 1035/179, declassified Colonial Office records (formerly classified SECRET), the UK National Archives, Kew.
6. CO 1035/179, declassified Colonial Office records.
7. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 146.
8. Balfour-Paul, 216. CO 1035/178, Declassified records of the Colonial Office, the UK National Archives, Kew. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 146.
9. CO 1035/179, declassified records of the Colonial Office, the UK National Archives, Kew.
10. In the thinly-veiled fictional portrayal of the inner workings of the British government in Whitehall, a "full and frank" discussion could only be beaten by "a direct exchange of views." In plain English, the first has blood on the carpet; the second has blood on the carpet that it takes days to clean up. See Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay, *Yes, Prime Minister*, "Power to the People," 1988, available from the BBC.
11. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 2, paragraph 5, declassified Colonial Office records (formally Top Secret), the UK National Archives, Kew.
12. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 2, paragraph 5.
13. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 2, paragraph 6.
14. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 2, 6, paragraph 11.
15. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 15.
16. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 5.
17. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 5, paragraph 13.
18. CO 1035/179, Prendergast report, 9, paragraph 21.
19. CO 1035/179, Prendergast report, 6, paragraph 14.
20. CO 1035/179, Prendergast report, 9, paragraph 22.
21. "Intelligence Organization in Aden and the Federation Working Party," December 1965, 1, paragraph 1, CO 1035/179, JIC, declassified Colonial Office records (formally TOP SECRET "Special Care"), the UK National Archives, Kew. Hereafter referred to as the "JIC McCarthy Report."

22. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 4, paragraph 15.
23. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 6, paragraph 18.
24. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 6, paragraph 18.
25. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 4, paragraph 14.
26. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 4, paragraph 15.
27. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 6, paragraph 18.
28. CO 1035/179, JIC McCarthy report, December 1965, 4, paragraph 16a.
29. CAB 182/55, declassified records of the Cabinet Office (formerly SECRET), UK National Archives, Kew.
30. CAB 182/55, 3.
31. CAB 182/55, 1.
32. For example, see internal Colonial Office telegram from the Colonial Secretary to the Governor of Hong Kong asking for a “Prendergast-like figure” to come out and look at Aden Special Branch due to its dreadful condition, 15 February 1965, CAB 1035/178, declassified records of the Colonial Office, the UK National Archives, Kew.
33. Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), Chapter 3, 53; British Army Field Manual, Vol 1, Part 10, COIN, 2010, 4-5, paragraph 1-15.

Chapter 4

Intelligence Exploitation and Interrogation

In many of these case reports the local British authorities were accused of using physical torture, at least during interrogation, as a means of extorting confession....The very fact that a neutral organization such as Amnesty International is not allowed to interview the detainees increases the suspicion of practice of torture at the interrogation centers.¹

—Dr. Selahaddin Rastgeldi

The hazard of emotional involvement of the interrogator with the subject during protracted interrogations of this type was demonstrated when on one of the several occasions that ZAKI was reduced to tears of longing for his family the interrogator also wept, albeit briefly.²

—Lieutenant Colonel Richards

There are few subjects within the intelligence world as controversial and emotive as the interrogation of captured insurgents or suspected terrorists. Any debate over the legacy of the Global War on Terror is likely to include a heated argument over the morality of torture and the alleged intelligence gains that it provides.³ This important topic requires a great deal more scrutiny than can be provided in this chapter. For the record, as a professional intelligence officer, I am both personally and professionally opposed to torture. It is both morally wrong and strategically, operationally and tactically counter-productive. It is worth noting the absence of any professional consensus on the efficacy of torture while other morally dubious forms of intelligence collection are accepted as legitimate and necessary.⁴

Pushing past the hyperbole and emotion that surrounds torture, it is critical that an essential truth is recognised: the exploitation of captured people and material for intelligence purposes is a legitimate area of warfare and must not be dismissed as too politically sensitive or difficult to do. Ideally exploitation policy should be addressed robustly at the highest level in a COIN campaign and not be neglected by military and civilian leaders as too difficult to resolve. If exploitation is done well it is a tremendous opportunity for gaining insight into the enemy and plotting their defeat. If done poorly it can all but guarantee strategic defeat in the court of

domestic and international political opinion while ceding the initiative to an enemy that already enjoys many advantages over the counter-insurgent.

This chapter examines the issue of exploitation by analysing the British approach in South Arabia. It addresses the issue of how exploitation in COIN is currently viewed by intelligence professionals within the British military and tries to identify the lessons that can be drawn from the British approach in South Arabia. There are four parts: one, key definitions of exploitation and interrogation within UK COIN doctrine; two, the value of interrogation within COIN; three, how the British approached exploitation in South Arabia (especially interrogation); four, the different views of the exploitation process within the British government and security forces during the South Arabia campaign. The wider implications are then highlighted for consideration in the final chapter.

“Systematic Exploitation:” Exploitation and Interrogation-Some Definitions

As a general principle, systematic exploitation refers to oversight of the Int Cycle (particularly collection) to ensure that all assets are tasked in accordance with their strengths based on a sound understanding of what they can do and what they are needed to do. In the British system, “systematic exploitation” is best summarised as the process where intelligence sources are systematically exploited by methodical tasking based on a thorough knowledge of their capabilities and also their limitations. In practice, it means the rigorous use of collection assets to gather information from all sources possible followed by a thorough examination by the analytical team. This principle applies to interrogation of captured people and evaluation of recovered material as much as it does to electronic surveillance, satellite imagery or human intelligence sources within the local community.

There is an additional aspect to “systematic exploitation” not covered in this definition: the idea that information collected by those intelligence sources must be thoroughly exploited until every possible facet of value has been brought forth before sending a final product to the analysts who process all reporting. A common phrase used is “wringing it dry”; essentially it encourages a mentality of all members of the Int Cycle to conduct analysis and add value. The primary place for the thorough examination of the information gathered is correctly placed at the “Processing” stage of the Int Cycle where analysts are responsible for rigorous analysis, evaluation and assessment. However, at the collection stage it is also appropriate for intelligence personnel to rigorously scrutinise the information they are gaining from their sources before they send it to their

colleagues responsible for processing. Scrutiny at the collection stage is important for two reasons: one, it provides the best chance of detecting technical failures in collection or deceit by a human intelligence source; two, it improves the quality of intelligence output by encouraging collectors to proactively seek as much value as possible from every report by not waiting on feedback from the analytical community. Nowhere is this more important than in the domain of exploitation of captured people and material where breakthroughs can create opportunities for gaining intelligence that can be directly used in the field against the insurgency.

Exploitation: People, Material and Documents

Exploitation of captured people and material is not a new concept but it has undergone something of a rebirth in the past ten years. It featured as a core component of targeting in the new edition of British military COIN doctrine.⁵ In summary, it is the exploitation for intelligence value of all captured documents, material (weapons and electronic equipment) and people related to enemy activity. It is a very challenging aspect to command as it comprises both the collection of information by specialists and then processing it into intelligence through painstaking evaluation and analysis. It also requires a joint, inter-agency approach due to the wide variety of skills necessary: interrogating suspected insurgents, technically exploiting a captured computer, translating documents from Arabic into English, guarding a prisoner, and forensic analysis of all of the above. Any organization tasked with exploitation becomes by default joint, inter-agency and even multinational; it is a microcosm of the challenges of the contemporary operating environment.

Unlike other forms of intelligence collection that are less controversial, there is a strategic risk from conducting exploitation: if your activities are perceived as being illegal, draconian or outright brutal it is highly likely that your cause will lose legitimacy locally and internationally. This risk is not absent from other forms of intelligence collection but it is not as severe. Since 9/11, it is hard to think of any incidents where satellite imagery intelligence collection has caused a strategic incident. However, when considering interrogation our minds immediately turn to recent events at the US facility in Bagram in 2012 where it was reported that papers containing verses from the Holy Quran were inadvertently burned by guards, to Baghdad in 2005 where the systematic abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib attracted international condemnation and to Basra in 2003 where the death of Abu Musa at the hands of the British Army resulted in the first prosecution, and conviction, of a British soldier for war crimes since 1945.⁶ If the risks are so high why bother pursuing exploitation, and particularly

interrogation, at all? To answer that question, and explore the lessons from the British experience in South Arabia, it is worth briefly examining the intelligence value of interrogation as a core part of the exploitation process and entire Int Cycle.

Interrogation: The Double-Edged Sword?

Interrogation is clearly not a new activity within the military profession. Although rarely credited with great insight into the domain of military intelligence techniques, the eminent 19th century military theorist and tactician Antoine Henri Jomini noted the importance of allocating high quality people to interrogate captured enemy prisoners:

A skilful Chief of Staff will always be able to select intelligence officers who can so frame their questions as to elicit important information from prisoners and deserters.⁷

Contemporary British COIN doctrine from January 2010 similarly notes the potential of interrogation to provide insight and valuable intelligence to support effective operations against the enemy network. It also the strategic risks of being perceived to do so illegally or with unnecessary force:

The [operations] cycle is fed by the conduct of security operations and is refined by the ever-increasing and accurate intelligence that the process itself generates through interrogation. If the force is not specifically structured, trained or resourced to conduct detention operations there is high risk to its effectiveness. The exploitation of detainees within the rule of law by well trained personnel is critical. Poorly conducted detention operations will be damaging and may drive large numbers of the uncommitted population into the ranks of the insurgency.⁸

The goal for intelligence professionals is to achieve a centrally controlled Int Cycle that utilises a diverse range of intelligence collection to provide insight and corroboration but also redundancy should the enemy find a method of counter-acting any particular technique. There is never any intent on the part of intelligence professionals to rely wholly on one collection method. In a COIN campaign the reliance on interrogation (or any other method) is not a deliberate choice made from a position of strength but the recognition that other methods are not proving effective and it provides the only way of moving forwards.

Interrogation in COIN

Interrogation can contribute to a COIN campaign but particularly in three scenarios: one, when the counter-insurgent is strongly in the ascendency and seeks a method of communicating directly with insurgents to persuade them their cause is lost. Two, when the violence in the conflict is intense and the counter-insurgent is trying to judge if morale within the insurgency is being degraded to the extent that they may change sides or even give up (identifying their “tipping point”). Three, when the insurgents are strongly in the ascendency with the counter-insurgent dangerously blind to who they are and what they are doing. In the latter circumstance all intelligence collection is very difficult—perhaps even non-existent in the case of finding human intelligence sources within the ranks of the insurgency. When this (dire) situation occurs interrogation of suspected insurgents can be the last toehold the intelligence organization has on developing an understanding of the enemy and thereby help the force find its way out of the darkness. Scenario three is the situation the British were in by January 1965. Of note, under the Emergency legislation they had the ability to detain and even deport suspected terrorists from South Arabia. This combination of internment and deportation was a key tool for intelligence exploitation as it provided a credible threat that could be used against the suspected terrorist. If the latter proved totally resistant to interrogation it also provided a last resort to remove him from the area and thereby at least reduce the threat.

In summary, interrogation is an essential part of an exploitation system integrated within the Int Cycle. It can provide four things: one, an insight into the structure, capabilities, and goals of the insurgency when all else has failed; two, a route into developing human intelligence sources within the local community or the insurgency itself; three, as the intelligence picture is rebuilt from the ground up, a responsive collection method to directly support precision targeting of the insurgency; four, if coupled with a method of internment that is perceived as being legitimate, it can be a lever to relieve political pressure and develop a constituency in favour of a peaceful settlement. The latter point may take many years but was illustrated in Northern Ireland where many Republican and Loyalist prisoners became strong advocates for the Good Friday Peace agreement against the opinions of hardliners within their respective organizations.⁹

Were there any lessons from how the British approached this issue in the South Arabia campaign? Of note, it was scenario three (under attack and in near total darkness on the insurgent organization) that the British found themselves in by January 1965. It was the results of interrogation that they were at least able to discern the silhouette of the insurgency that

had surrounded them. So how did the British approach interrogation and exploitation in an Islamic country where they lacked language skills, faced an externally supported insurgency and international criticism?

Exploitation in South Arabia

Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again

In 1964 the NLF increased the pressure on the British and their local allies by spreading their influence in the Protectorate and Aden State through an aggressive programme of political subversion. The targets were twofold: in the Protectorate the tribal balance of power that favoured the leaders of the would-be Federation of South Arabia; in Aden it was the critical security force apparatus that underpinned British control. In Aden, this meant one thing: a violent campaign of terrorist attack against the Aden Special Branch. In particular, the Arab officers who ran local human intelligence sources and provided the critical link between the British and the Arab populace.¹⁰

As 1964 progressed, losses in Special Branch took their toll on intelligence collection and overall understanding of the insurgency. By December 1964 (a full twelve months into the Aden Emergency) the only viable intelligence being gained was from interrogation. However, it had not been an easy journey nor were all problems resolved. Special Branch's losses had been so severe that the High Commissioner requested support from the Ministry of Defence.¹¹ It must have been recognised as a serious issue as the response by the Int Corps was to send the Commanding Officer (CO) and Chief Instructor of their specialist human intelligence interrogation unit.¹² They deployed for four months in total and were recognised as having made a strong contribution to rehabilitating the interrogation capability in South Arabia—at least in terms of delivering some useful intelligence.¹³ There were two major issues outstanding from the visit: the feasibility of Special Branch recovering enough to resume leadership of interrogation from the army and the strategic climate in the international community that painted British interrogation as brutal, illegal and illegitimate.¹⁴ Before examining the strategic issue of legitimacy, it is worth examining in the depth the lessons from the military challenge in rebuilding the interrogation capability in Aden.

Rebuilding Interrogation in South Arabia

The Int Corps Approach

The Int Corps team deployed to Aden from 18 September 1964 to 30 Jan 1965 and produced two reports on their operational experience. The

first report was written in early Dec 1964 by Lieutenant Colonel Richards, the CO; the second in early February by his chief instructor Sergeant-Major Everson. Both were classified Secret and reached a strictly controlled audience in Whitehall: the MOD, the Colonial Office and third organization—probably BSS.¹⁵ The team was tasked to take control of the interrogation effort to identify the terrorists attacking British forces and to re-equip and run the interrogation center on an enduring basis if they saw fit to do so.¹⁶ Once they arrived in Aden, the focal point for their effort was taking over the interrogation of all those held as suspected terrorists but particularly an individual suspected of being an important figure in the insurgency. The context was the acknowledged lack of capacity of Aden Special Branch to cope with its own losses and the situation. The insights gained from his interrogation, and from the remaining personnel in the facility, provided the bulk of the intelligence gained and lessons learned from the JSIU team.

If the two reports are compared against each other some telling insights emerge: one, breakthroughs can occur when certain basic techniques are followed—the oral, aural and visual isolation of prisoners from each other based on alert guarding and physically suitable facility; concerted interrogation sessions focusing on a vulnerable individual; a contrast in approaches by the interrogators; support by intelligence personnel to the interrogators to ensure maximum information is available to the interrogators. However, even where breakthroughs are made, complacency amongst the intelligence team—especially the interrogators who have invested so much personal effort in the process—can be a significant risk. Even when a suspect “breaks,” or comes “off story,” that is no guarantee that they will not continue to resist and withhold information. Regular changes in techniques by the exploitation team are needed, and must be anticipated, to keep a dominant position and prevent the terrorist suspect gaining the initiative.

The location and physical layout of the detention and interrogation facility in Aden was so poor in September 1964 that it merited strong words of criticism by Lieutenant Colonel Richards. He found it:

quite unsuitable for the purpose in that:

- a) Isolation of the prisoners, verbal or visual, is impossible.
- b) Part of the courtyard and the whole verandah are overlooked by the road leading into Fort Morbut (used, by among others, local Army-employed civilians) and by the Corporals’ Club. Had the building been erected 180 degrees the other way—that

is, out to sea—this major security problem would have been nullified.¹⁷

The guard force was in little better condition. Their lack of basic professionalism was absolutely dreadful. The guard force lacked even a basic level of competence. They were nowhere near creating a professional culture designed to maximise the prospects for gaining intelligence from the detainees. To do so, it is important for the guards to be competent, behave legally but also to see their role as part of the intelligence process. Lieutenant Colonel Richards found that:

Discipline was, to say the least, slack. On initial inspection the main suspect in a terrorist incident was playing cards through the Grille door of his cell with a man who was an eye witness against him. At meal times and for ablution purposes prisoners were not segregated. Arab policemen chatted with prisoners.¹⁸

The short-term solution was for the military to take the lead on guarding and for the guard force to take a significant degree of its direction from the intelligence team—particularly the interrogators:

This situation [no segregation and poor guarding standards] was quickly corrected and guards were briefed daily by the PSI Sergeant-Major Everson. Shortly after the arrival of the team guard duties were taken over by the RM Commandos, a number of whom had been in interrogation centers as prisoners during E and E exercises [Escape and Evasion] in the UK and knew the form.¹⁹

It is worth noting this relationship as the issue of who controls the detention aspect of exploitation is by no means an easy one in a COIN campaign. By allowing intelligence personnel responsible for interrogation to control the exploitation process, rather than military police or some allegedly more neutral military branch, opponents of the internment and interrogation policy can claim that the conditions have been created for illegal, or at least immoral, techniques to be used against detainees. By placing the detainees under the control of a guard force that is not under the same command and control as the interrogators then a separation of the two activities is achieved. However, that is likely to come at the cost of unity of effort within the exploitation facility to create the optimal circumstances to enable intelligence breakthroughs to occur. Of note, it did not occur to Richards and Everson to ask for someone else to come in and take

over the detention role; surviving documentation suggests they took their role in guiding the guard force as a key part of the intelligence process.

The interrogators faced a difficult challenge when they arrived in Aden: they knew nothing about the NLF as an organization, had no local human or technical intelligence sources to draw on, and had to start from scratch interrogating prisoners who had been held for a long period without giving any information. After isolating the prisoners from each other, setting up a competent military guard force, calling in military engineers to improve the infrastructure and gaining what insight they could from Special Branch, the interrogators set about their task. They chose the prisoner who had been interrogated least thus far as that provided the “freshest” candidate for interrogation. They dedicated their efforts to that one individual for five days of concerted, focused work. It resulted in the detainee Zaki Lufti Freij (hereafter referred to as “Zaki”) coming “off story” and disclosing a substantial amount of information about the NLF. Richards described the process of achieving a breakthrough with Zaki as:

Sergeant-Major Everson would interrogate in a very hostile and harsh manner for some hours, followed by Lieutenant Colonel Richards who showed a correct, but slightly sympathetic manner. As time went on the show of sympathy was increased, and at the same time it was demonstrated that the sympathetic interrogator was also the one in command. Sergeant-Major Everson continued to be harsh, hostile and fear inspiring throughout . . . on the fifth day of interrogation, when the team arrived for the evening session, ZAKI asked to see Lieutenant Colonel Richards, threw himself on his mercy and broke down.²⁰

Once the breakthrough was made Lieutenant Colonel Richards was clearly very confident that his team had gained the cooperation of the detainee and that he was providing a hereto unknown level of insight into the anti-British insurgency:

ZAKI produced, in considerable detail, membership lists, cell lists and the political instruction programme of the Front. He also gave names of key men most of whom were still being sought by SB when the team left Aden...The information produced by the interrogation of ZAKI was assessed by the Aden Intelligence Center and Special Branch as of great importance. It was their first proof that the National Liberation Front existed as an organization, it gave them a very large amount of detailed information on the Front, and it confirmed beyond doubt that

FAISAL SHABI was an important—if not the most important—Egyptian agent in Aden.²¹

The successes reported by Lieutenant Colonel Richards represent a breakthrough in intelligence that would be very gratifying for any organization—particularly one as hard-pressed as the British AIC and Special Branch in late 1964 Aden. However, the success in getting Zaki “off story” in Oct-Sep 1964 is not just telling for the techniques used to make the initial breakthrough but also for highlighting the dangers of overconfidence and need for a long term plan that anticipates continued resistance by the detainee.

Following Lieutenant Colonel Richards departure from Aden further NLF-linked detainees were captured and put through the new army-led interrogation facility at Fort Morbut. In Sergeant-Major Everson’s subsequent report from late January 1965 it emerges that Zaki’s submission was temporary or at least equivocal. Sergeant-Major Everson’s interrogation of other NLF prisoners Abdul Maliq and Abdul Razzaq unearthed a significant NLF leadership meeting at which Zaki had been present but not disclosed in his earlier interrogations. Sergeant-Major Everson explains:

In spite of ZAKI’s long and comprehensive confession obtained by Lieutenant Colonel Richards and Sergeant-Major Everson on their first visit, both ABDUL RAZZAQ and ABDUL MALIK spoke of an important meeting of leaders of the National Front in Aden at which ZAKI was present but had not mentioned.²²

Sergeant-Major Everson now faced a difficult challenge: resuming exploitation of a detainee, who had been processed once before, hailed as a significant success, released from exploitation and prepared for a legal process likely to lead to safe repatriation to his home country. This situation highlights the importance of persistence and avoidance of complacency; it also underlines the likelihood of continued passive resistance by dedicated insurgents and the need for the exploitation team to anticipate resistance and develop a plan to retain the initiative. The steps taken by Sergeant-Major Everson and his team are illustrative of how difficult this can be and the importance of disrupting the physical and mental comfort zone of the detainee:

Accordingly, ZAKI was moved from the comfortable surroundings in which he was being detained pending deportation proceedings (he is a Jordanian) back to the Spartan life of the

Interrogation Center. When confronted with the information regarding this meeting he went on a silence strike for three days.²³

Fortunately for the British, Sergeant-Major Everson and his team were able to overcome Zaki's resistance and made a further breakthrough. The reasons given by Zaki for finally succumbing to the second wave of interrogation reveal the complexity of the task facing an intelligence exploitation team. There is no single reason why Zaki broke; it was an accumulation of factors—two of which were accidental:

he eventually broke down and confessed to being at the meeting. Later he told his interrogator that three things that were instrumental in affecting his confession, these were:

- a. the fact that the interrogator knew about the meeting, the fact that there was blood on the floor of his cell (a previous prisoner had had a genuine haemorrhage from natural causes),
- b. the fact that a previous prisoner had written on the wall of the cell with his finger dipped in soup the following quotation, "The torture of the conscience is the worst torture of all."²⁴

The final quote from Zaki gets at the heart of interrogation and exploitation: the power of conveying to the detainee superior knowledge by the authorities—sufficiently strong information overmatch that resistance is simply pointless—but supported by a psychological feeling of uncertainty. The latter will always be an uncomfortable area as it walks closest to dark places that few care to tread. Yet is it really different from the fear achieved in the enemy frontline by prolonged artillery bombardment or the sound of approaching tanks? Regardless of the outcome of the latter moral debate, the importance of focusing on convincing the detainee that he faces a captor who already knows everything about him is an important lesson. It means that the exploitation center itself requires a strong intelligence team to support interrogation so that perception of superiority is achieved with the detainee. The irony then is that to gain high quality intelligence output from the exploitation center, it is necessary first to invest in intelligence staff to support the exploitation process.

There are six further lessons that come from the interrogation of Zaki and his two colleagues Maliq and Razzaq. One, the shock of capture must be maintained for a detainee by isolating them from other prisoners and not beginning interrogation until a clear plan is in place. Two, it takes time and effort of a focused interrogation team to have a chance of bringing

a high quality detainee off story—five days in the case of Zaki. Three, a breakthrough is unlikely to be achieved by one single act: think about how to create a range of conditions that will push the subject to come off story. Four, no matter how cathartic the breakthrough may appear to all parties (interrogator and subject) the exploitation team must not be lulled by their own success—expect, and plan for, continued resistance and evasion. Five, build and man a detention facility from the beginning, optimising the conditions for exploitation. Six, have a team of intelligence analysts available to support the interrogators—in the case of Richards and Everson they noted the absence of good quality intelligence support from Special Branch so took the lead on research themselves:

Intelligence Support. A general briefing on the requirement was given to Lieutenant Colonel Richards but no briefs for the detainees awaiting immediate interrogation were ready and throughout the visit the initiative in acquiring briefs and information had to be taken by the team. This is not to say SB were uncooperative. On the contrary, they were most eager to help in every way possible but had little understanding of the requirement besides being heavily overworked.²⁵

The latter point is particularly damning of the Special Branch. Intelligence on terrorism in Aden was their primary task; to be unable to give satisfactory support to the interrogation team as they exploited the only suspects in detention is a fundamental failure. It lends further credibility to the assessment by Prendergast twelve months later that Special Branch, and the wider intelligence community, were complacent and incompetent (no matter how well meaning). Prendergast and Richards' assessment of the weak knowledge of the insurgency within the intelligence staff in Aden is supported by another contemporary—Superintendent Jim Herlihy—who became intimately involved in the intelligence exploitation and targeting process.²⁶ Herlihy was a career Special Branch officer brought in by Prendergast in 1966 as part of his reforms in Aden. The quality of the organization that he joined was underwhelming; his observations on the level of knowledge of their enemy indicate suggests there was a corporate failing within the intelligence community:

Presumably to remedy the totally inadequate knowledge of the enemy, all AIC personnel and the Interrogation Center staff were given a lecture by a visiting Foreign Office gentleman. This dealt entirely with the structure and modus operandi of the Egyptian Intelligence Service, and in particular on the difficulties of penetrating this very active and security-conscious body.

Although not without academic interest, the lecture was of no practical use. We were less concerned with the machinations of the EIS than with the operations within Aden of the NLF and FLOSY, and about these the lecturer obviously knew as little as we did.²⁷

Despite the frustrations that Lieutenant Colonel Richards, Sergeant-Major Everson (and later Superintendent Herlihy) clearly experienced when setting up a functioning interrogation capability in Aden it is interesting to see some degree of evolution and innovation. Even in the short period between their two reports there is a subtle improvement in the British capacity to handle a high value target. Everson relates the handling of Abdul Razzaq in terms that suggest planning and imagination went into the methodology of exploiting him once he came “off story.” Of note, is the willingness to create a smaller separate facility for important detainees and decision to move Razzaq to increase the likelihood he will be more productive as a one size fits all approach may not work for all prisoners:

Abdul RAZZAQ proved to be a difficult person to interrogate as his story proved to be a mixture of truth, half-truths and lies, but it was from him that the visiting team eventually obtained the organizational details of the National Front....on 18 Jan 65, ABDUL MALIK, ABDUL RAZZAQ and ZAKI were transferred from the Interrogation Center to a safe house and Sergeant-Major Everson moved in and lived with them until his return to the UK on 30 Jan 65. His task was to produce a comprehensive debriefing report on NATIONAL FRONT activities in ADEN from their combined stories, and this he did.²⁸

The Richards and Everson reports provide an insight into two other areas of intelligence exploitation: one, the integration of interrogation into the operations process for the agencies targeting the insurgency; two, the importance of linguist and interpreters to enable interrogation. Towards the end of their initial visit in Sep-Oct 1964 Lieutenant Colonel Richards and Sergeant-Major Everson were surprised when the local security forces acted on the intelligence gained from their interrogation of Zaki and arrested twenty people:

During the latter part of the JSIU team’s stay in Aden, just before the local elections, Special Branch made a number of arrests—some based on information provided by ZAKI—and flooded the interrogation center, without warning, with 20 detainees. The Center is designed to hold 6.²⁹

This is a startling failure in basic management of resources and coordination. However, it also shows an even more significant structural problem: the separations of operations from intelligence and exploitation. It is fundamental in a COIN campaign to ensure intelligence is driving operations and aim that the results from those operations should generate yet more intelligence to enable another wave of operations. In recent years this has been encapsulated in the term “F3EA”—“Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyse.”³⁰ The situation described by Lieutenant Colonel Richards is the worst kind of “left hand-right hand” confusion; it is indicative of ignorance of basic coordination methods amongst military and law enforcement. It is further corroboration of Prendergast’s assessment that Aden Special Branch was endemically poor.

A final point from Lieutenant Colonel Richards was that interpreters were not an essential requirement in Aden as “almost all Adenis of sufficient ability and intelligence to become involved in political and/or terrorist activities speak English. Thus Arab-speaking interrogators or the use of interpreters are fortunately not essential.”³¹ Leaving aside the likely prospect of those cunning politically aware Arabs not playing cricket by pretending not to speak English, the subsequent report from Sergeant-Major Everson highlighted the reality of conducting exploitation in an Arab-speaking region:

SAID MOHAMMED NASIR. Arrested as owner of car arrested as owner of car seen by two British NCOs leaving the scene of the bomb incident at the OASIS bar where two British servicemen were killed and nineteen injured....his interrogation continues dependent upon the availability of an Arabic interpreter.³²

It is particularly poor for intelligence professionals not to identify this critical capability as insurgent organizations tend to reorganise quickly post attack when a member of the cell is captured (as in the case of Nasir). In practice that means the currency of the intelligence he has to offer on his fellow cell members diminishes with every passing hour. It is very unlikely that an individual so strongly linked to a serious attack of this magnitude would be left fallow if there were sufficient linguists available to support interrogation.

Exploitation: The Benefits of Peer Review

The above comparison of the lessons learned by the two best qualified and most experienced interrogation personnel in the Int Corps (the CO and PSI of JSIU) highlights the extent of what can be achieved by hard

work and professionalism involved. However, it should also underline the importance of avoiding complacency and always seeking a new advantage over the captured enemy. An important component of ensuring the intelligence community continually strives for high standards is external scrutiny and feedback. In the case of interrogation in Aden, it is worth considering some other views from contemporaries.

A British government organization known within Whitehall as “Box 500” (probably BSS) sent a memo to the Security Intelligence Advisor that specifically refuted two points within the Richards report: one, that Arab linguists would not be necessary; two, that the intelligence breakthrough provided from Zaki was as significant as suggested. Leaving aside the degree of professional rivalry that may have existed between army intelligence and BSS (if any), it is worth noting that the Box 500 assessment of the utility of interpreters was more realistic than that of Lieutenant Colonel Richards. It is also worth noting that they were correctly sceptical about Zaki’s degree of cooperation:

The SLO [Security Liaison Officer] does not agree that the visit of the interrogation team was quite as successful as made out in the report. In particular, the interrogation of ZAKI did not produce the high grade of intelligence indicated and although some of the information was valuable it appears that it was mostly low grade and that he by no means gave all he could.³³

The final point is on the mark; although the preceding criticism appears slightly churlish given the context of a near intelligence vacuum on any details about the NLF’s existence and inner workings prior to the Zaki interrogation. The benefit of peer review from within the intelligence community is clear: persistent exploitation of the source to develop greater understanding is imperative with no room for complacency.

The Prendergast report was more balanced in its assessment of the progress made “I understand that the small team of interrogators has done extremely well and has produced some valuable intelligence.”³⁴ He did make three observations of significant issues to be resolved within the exploitation center: one, the leadership, tasking and organization of the exploitation process; two, the lack of exploitation of captured documents; three, administrative control of the interrogation center.

The latter two issues are fairly straightforward points: to achieve the best possible chance of breaking a detainee’s resistance then the translation and use of all documents captured with him is a significant boon:

I was also not convinced that adequate use is made of captured documents. These can be a most valuable aid to interrogation and I would suggest that the Head of Special Branch might explore the possibility of arranging for the translation and processing of captured documents to be carried out at the Center. This should ensure that particularly sensitive and useful papers are made available to the interrogators with the least possible delay.³⁵

The point about oversight and administrative control of the interrogation facility is so basic that it is troubling that it was necessary—particularly in light of the efforts made one year earlier when Lieutenant Colonel Richards’ team reinvigorated basic guarding standards in the facility. However, the points made by Prendergast indicated that whoever ran the facility was not doing so to basic standards—simple to solve but with strategic consequences:

I would stress the need for tight control and general running of the Center. In view of the interest shown by various organizations both local and international in the care and treatment of detainees, it is essential that the responsible officer, in this case the Head of Special Branch, is always able to give a clear statement of the position at the Center and the physical condition of each detainee at any particular time.³⁶

The leadership and tasking of interrogators harks back in part to the issue of centralized control of intelligence. Prendergast’s concern was that the output from interrogation was not being properly analysed and assessed by Special Branch. Therefore the latter was not giving direction and tasks to the interrogators to ensure that the detainee was properly exploited for maximum intelligence value. In Prendergast’s view:

I found myself wondering if the interrogation team in Aden was not left too much to its own devices...I feel that there should be more control over and direction of the interrogation effort by the Head of Special Branch. The interrogators should not have to work out their own interrogation plan; this should be kept under review by the desk officer directly concerned at Special Branch headquarters. Every interrogation report should be critically examined by the Head of Special Branch and his desk officer to ensure that no lead is being overlooked or inadequately developed.³⁷

This is a telling insight into how Prendergast perceived best practice for CT targeting in a COIN campaign (to use contemporary terminology). He did not question the basic premise that there should be a direct command and control relationship between the organization responsible for intelligence and CT operations (in this case Special Branch) and the exploitation team (in this case the Interrogation Center). It is a partnership between the two but with the collector taking direction, and even specific input on the interrogation plan, from the officer responsible for prosecuting the operation against the enemy network. Rather than perceive this as a conflict of interest or dangerous interference he saw it as the only way of achieving effectiveness and efficiency:

There is no implied criticism of the interrogator in this practice. The interrogator is not meant necessarily to see the whole picture whereas the desk officer in his broader knowledge of the subject is better placed to spot omissions in interrogations and to gauge the potential of the material in front of him.³⁸

Herlihy offers an additional perspective on what progress had been made with interrogation by Spring 1966. It is not a ringing endorsement of the capability and provides a useful counter-balance to any culture of complacency:

The Interrogation Center had an equally minuscule chance of producing anything worthwhile. Army Intelligence Corps personnel, some of whom had some knowledge of Arabic, staffed it. None, however, had any of the local knowledge without which an interrogator is working in the dark, and nobody was in a position to give them any kind of useful brief on the organizations or personalities their clients were, allegedly, working for. Like everybody else, they were having to start from scratch with no assets, and were doing their best under the unsatisfactory circumstances.³⁹

Again, Herlihy reinforces the point about intelligence support to interrogators with the collective team having a sound understanding of the local environment in order to achieve success. Overall, there was still a long way to go; unfortunately for the British their time was rapidly running out. By the time Herlihy made his observations it was 1966: the British government had reversed its commitment and decided to abandon its position, and allies, in South Arabia. It was also over two years into the Emergency and eighteen months since it had called out the experts from the army

to re-organised the interrogation capability. This was an organization that was just not learning fast enough.

Herlihy's account of his appointment by Prendergast as commander of the new CT group within the Aden Special Branch illustrates the joint, inter-agency nature of the organization, its links to the army unit it was directly supporting and the CT team's control of the interrogation facility:

In John's [Prendergast] office the briefing was short and clear. Stress was laid on the desirability of immediate results. There was the warning that that all operations must be strictly controlled. In particular, the Interrogation Center was to be kept under strict supervision, and was to be maintained in such a state that it could be opened for inspection at any time by representatives of the Red Cross, visiting junketeers from the United Nations or any stray self-promoting politician on a taxpayer-funded holiday. The message was loud and clear. On no account was anything to be allowed to happen which could be considered embarrassing to the Government of the United Kingdom in general, and its Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in particular. The basic set-up of B Group was designed to utilise to best advantage the resources available. In the absence of an effective Police Force, this meant that it was heavily dependent on the Army...For all except the simplest operations it would also have to rely on them to provide the necessary operational personnel and any subsequent back-up required. What the Army would gain (it was hoped) would be better targeting, enabling them to strike back more effectively and thus reduce their casualties. Aden Brigade invariably met all demands made on them, and never provided B Group with less than 100% co-operation. "B" Group was responsible for the production of operational intelligence, taking action on that intelligence, and any interrogation, documentation and detention of prisoners resulting. The existing Interrogation Center was assimilated into the Group. Under the command of an Intelligence Corps Major, it was staffed by Arabic linguists of ranks ranging from Sergeant to Major, with a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy and a gentleman from the Foreign Office thrown in for good measure.⁴⁰

The degree of integration and cooperation described by Herlihy is impressive even by contemporary standards where the "JIIM" environment is stressed as the way ahead hard won through recent experience

rather than our operational inheritance. Although in a modern conflict any CT team is likely to be commanded by the military, it is worth noting the focus in one individual to achieve unity of command and effort with “B” Team. The organizations may be different but the environment was very similar and the methods of leadership and command very similar to our own current practices. It is also telling that Herlihy did not ask for a significant increase in manpower to his team. When considering how best to pursue targeting, it is worth noting the two essential ingredients: cooperation from all agencies and a small number of dedicated personnel working hard.

Conclusion: Balancing Exploitation with Legitimacy

Exploitation in South Arabia was clearly a significant challenge and one that the British forces made some effort to address. However, it is telling that their efforts to do so lacked appropriate investment in resources (the laughably poor interrogation facility at Fort Morbut) and a strong sense of urgency. The impetus and expertise for change came from outsiders brought in to audit, grip and reorganise the local organization that proved totally inadequate for the task. Significantly, those brought in were experienced personnel who had learned their lessons in previous British colonial conflicts. What obstacles prevented this expertise from spreading throughout British institutions through doctrine and culture? The surviving documentation that relates to Special Branch, the intelligence community and the exploitation capability shows that as early as September 1964 it was evident even in Whitehall that all was not well. The lack of urgency in addressing those core issues is a significant factor in explaining the British failure to adapt quickly and ultimately their defeat.

Notes

1. Dr. Rastgeldi's official report on behalf of Amnesty International from 1966, <http://www.amnesty.org/fr/library/asset/MDE27/002/1966/en/b88ed2e0-6be4-42d6-baa0-ddacb29bdb82/mde270021966eng.pdf> (accessed 29 November 2012).
2. Lieutenant Colonel Richards, "Report in Interrogation in Aden," November 1964, Classified SECRET "Handle with Care," page 5, paragraph 31, CO 1035 178, declassified Cabinet Office records, the UK National Archives, Kew, hereafter referred to as "the Richards report." The individual referred to as "ZAKI" was an important figure within the NLF. He was captured by the British in approximately October 1964 and was subject to extensive interrogation by Lieutenant Colonel Richards and his team. During this period it was customary within formal intelligence report writing in the British military for place names and the names of persons to be capitalised hence "ZAKI." The original capitalisation within official British reports has been kept when quoted in this document; no changes have been made to increase emphasis or prominence within primary source quotes. Within the main body of the thesis individual names are written as normal e.g. Zaki not ZAKI, Razzaq not RAZZAQ.
3. For a pro-torture narrative that is typically ill-informed about the realities of intelligence exploitation and interrogation see <http://www.theweek.co.uk/27027/let%E2%80%99s-be-realistic-about-torture> (accessed 29 November 2012).
4. For example: electronic surveillance of private communications or directing human intelligence agents to conduct tasks that place their lives at extreme risk.
5. See British Army Field Manual, *COIN*, 2010, 5-5 to 5-7.
6. BBC coverage of all three incidents provides a relatively balanced narrative (all accessed 29 November 2012); Bagram Quran burning: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17116595>; Abu Ghraib: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4475657.stm>; Baha Musa: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6609237.stm; For partial news coverage from a Middle Eastern media outlet see Al Jazeera: Abu Ghraib, <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/04/200841011243741174.html> (accessed 29 November 2012).
7. Antoine Henri Jomini, "Art of War," from *Roots of Strategy: Book 2* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1987), 537-538.
8. British Army Field Manual, *COIN*, 2010, 8-C-2.
9. For a first-hand account of the views of senior Loyalist and Republican prisoners, see BBC documentaries by Peter Taylor—"PROVOS" and "LOYALISTS." British Film Institute archive, <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/series/28549> (accessed 29 November 2012).
10. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 136.
11. CO 1035/178, "IS Report on Interrogation in Aden, 18 Sep–25 Oct 1964," the Richards report, 31, paragraph 4.

12. The visit had a high enough profile for the Richards report to be circulated within the small community in Whitehall concerned with intelligence in Aden in 1964. See CO 1035/178 for cover note from Colonel (A/Brig) Cowper (Chief of Intelligence in Aden) to Jack Morton at the Colonial Office and copied in to “Box 500” (probably BSS).

13. CO 1035/179, McCarthy.

14. Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 185-188

15. The second report from Sergeant-Major Everson is hereafter referred to as the Everson Report, also found in declassified Colonial Office records, CO 1035 178. The Richards Report includes a note that copies in a government department referred to as “Box 500”; this is probably a cover term for BSS.

16. CO 1035 178, Richards Report, 31-32, paragraph 6.

17. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 32, paragraph 12.

18. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 32, paragraph 13.

19. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 32, paragraph 13.

20. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 33, paragraph 17-18.

21. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 33, paragraph 19 and 21.

22. CO 1035 178, Everson Report, 8, paragraph 7.

23. CO 1035 178, Everson Report, 8, paragraph 7.

24. CO 1035/178, Everson Report, 8, paragraph 7.

25. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 32, paragraph 10.

26. Superintendent (Retired) Jim Herlihy, “The Aden Emergency, 1963-67” from *British Empire*, Stephen Luscombe editor. <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/images4/article/article.htm> (accessed 29 November 2012).

27. Herlihy, Chapter 2.

28. CO 1035/178, Everson Report, 8, paragraphs 8 and 10.

29. CO 1035/178, Richards Report, 34, paragraph 25.

30. For an unclassified but thorough account of the concept of F3EA targeting, see publication from the RAND Corporation, http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP258.pdf (accessed 29 November 2012); The Small Wars Journal’s discussion of F3EA, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/topics/F3EA> (accessed 29 November 2012).

31. Richards Report, page 36, paragraph 33, CO 1035/178.

32. CO 1035/178, Everson Report, 9, paragraph 17.

33. CO 1035/179, note from Security Advisor to JO Morton, 25 February 1965.

34. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 10, paragraph 24.

35. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 11, paragraph 26.

36. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 11-12, paragraph 27.

37. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 11, paragraph 25.

38. CO 1035/179, Prendergast Report, 11, paragraph 25.

39. Herlihy, Chapter 2.

40. Herlihy, Chapter 4.

Chapter 5

COIN in South Arabia Intelligence Lessons Learned?

The major drawback still remains a lack of timely intelligence. Little information is forthcoming from the local population, and the Interrogation Center, following the recent publicity and Egyptian inspired smear campaign has become almost ineffective.¹

—Admiral Michael LeFanu

In late June 2009...the American and British troops could not venture a kilometer from their cramped base without confronting machine gun and rocket fire from insurgents. Local farmers, wary of reprisals by the Taliban, refused to make eye contact with foreign soldiers, much less speak with them or offer valuable battlefield and demographic information.²

—Major General Flynn

The evolution of the British campaign in South Arabia, and the role of intelligence within it, contains no simple answers, panaceas or silver bullets for anyone seeking answers to the challenges of stability operations in the contemporary operating environment. Study of the surviving material provokes feelings of frustration at the gaps in the records—feelings probably not dissimilar to those of the participants who grappled with the problem. Yet the South Arabia campaign should not be ignored; it sits obstinately as an enigmatic failure between campaigns of relative British success in Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya and Oman. The question of how the UK managed to achieve its political objectives in those equally adverse environments yet failed in South Arabia goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the inadequacy of the intelligence organization in South Arabia, despite the attempts at reforming it, provides an insight into the relationship between political and military realms. It is an object lesson on the impact of a major policy change on the operational approach and the ability of intelligence to provide any meaningful support in a COIN campaign.

This chapter covers two areas: first, a proposition of the strategic issues that contributed to the overall intelligence organization being inadequate to the task in South Arabia; two, an examination of the enduring

lessons for the intelligence community using the Int Cycle and principles of intelligence as the framework for analysis.

The overall British failure in South Arabia is in itself still a slightly controversial idea. Within the military, there was reluctance to admit that it was a defeat; to some extent this attitude persists—not least due to the use of Paget’s high quality, but flawed, memoir by many historians. Paget provides admirable detail and insight into the period but is unable to avoid some denial at the extent of British failure. He accepts that “none of the original political aims of 1965 were in fact to be attained in 1967.”³ However, on the same page he goes on to claim British forces were at least successful in curbing terrorism, providing space for negotiations and preventing the government from negotiating with the insurgents under duress. The latter three military goals are consistent with a fighting withdrawal and negotiated surrender not success in any other terms. There is also a degree of wishful thinking and even a lack of logical consistency within his three points: it is not valid to cite success in curbing terrorism, and the need to create space for negotiations, yet claim the insurgents were not achieving conditions of at least some duress against your own government. What is more telling is the absence of meaningful metrics of success: fractures within the insurgency; overtures from insurgent leadership for a truce; reduced aid from external sponsors; an increase in intelligence supplied by the local populace. In fact, during 1965-67 all those metrics were going in the wrong direction for the UK forces—something not lost on Commander-in-Chief Middle East.

The view articulated by Paget was no doubt written with sincerity; what can explain this loss of perspective? The ‘no defeat’ narrative is rested upon a very narrow view of the political interest of the UK in the region and, most importantly, the success achieved by the insurgency as a driving factor for the UK’s political objectives changing. It also failed to account for the changed political context in the Middle East in which Britain’s credibility and position was significantly undermined by abandonment of South Arabia. The account from the recently sacked High Commissioner Sir Kennedy Trevaskis is an insight into the unrealistic political decision-making culture behind the decision:

Following the announcement of the British decision to withdraw, the incident of terrorism in Aden soared sharply to new heights of sanguinary brutality. The rebuff to silly British hopes that it would usher in a new era of peace and good-will was unmistakable but they floated bravely on in a fresh spate of wishful thinking.⁴

Only in a very narrow sense there is any truth to the suggestion that there was no British defeat and if there was it was political. The forces that withdrew in November 1967 had achieved at least 50 percent of their new political objective. However, this was based on a complete political U-turn on Britain's interests in South Arabia and the wider region. The change in British policy decided in late 1965 and announced in February 1966 could not have been starker. It switched from creating a friendly state called the Federation of South Arabia that hosted a major British base in Aden to completely leaving South Arabia altogether, retaining no base, reneging on (nearly all) defence commitments to the Federal Government and even being prepared to handover to whatever form of local government existed—even if that was the insurgency and not the Federal Government.⁵ In his final newsletter to CDS, Commander in Chief Middle East noted his own satisfaction at the successful military withdrawal but could not keep his concern for the intended political end-state from creeping into his report:

Perhaps more by luck than judgement we were able to achieve our two main aims: an orderly withdrawal and some prospects for stability after our departure. But it was a close run thing.⁶

Although it is understandable for combatants in a conflict to be reluctant to admit defeat, it is essential that it be confronted lest denial creep in and prevent positive change within the institution. The uncomfortable truth is that the British government's decision to abandon South Arabia was driven by the dreadful security situation, making achievement of the original political and military goals impossible based on the resources the new government was prepared to expend. This decision was at least in part driven by the enemy's political narrative as the new British government formed by the Labour Party had long had misconceived ideas about the validity of the insurgency in South Arabia as legitimate opposition, a "national resistance," rather than Egyptian-sponsored violence seeking to impose its own political settlement. If it was possible for British soldiers and Adeni police officers to walk safely through Sheikh Othman District, or for the leaders of the Federation to drive through the Sheikhdoms and not fear the NLF, then there would have been no pressure for the British to leave or abandon their original goals. Throw in British civilian and military casualties with little prospect that the situation would improve in the near future and it is clear this was not a strategic decision made from a position of strength. Either way, the Egyptian-sponsored insurgency prevailed by persuading the British political leadership that it was not winning, could not win and should not even keep trying. By any measure, that is defeat.

The exchange on this topic between the dismissed High Commissioner Trevaskis and Minister of Defence Denis Healy MP reveals the underlying assumptions of the Labour government:

When I heard the news I [Trevaskis] was appalled. Memories tumbled over themselves in a crowded confusion: all the promises and assurances that so many of us had made, of the debts we owed to Arab friends who remained true to their word when our fortunes were at their lowest...I quickly obtained an appointment with Denis Healy...[according to Healy] they had done their best and, having failed to get any Arab agreement, had had to abandon it. The fact was that the people of Aden did not want a military base and to try to impose one on them would be wrong.⁷

Lest Trevaskis's strong views be portrayed as sour grapes from a discredited civil servant it is worth noting the sceptical comments from the Commander in Chief Middle East Forces in his official newsletter back to Whitehall in 1966. Following the British U-Turn he wrote:

The main event of the period has however been [the] decision to abandon the base in Aden and to refuse any commitment to defend the Federation of South Arabia after independence. And our main concern has been the effect of this decision on the incredibly confused situation in the Yemen and in South Arabia, and the possible longer term effects of these things, taken together, on stability on the peninsula as a whole...whatever their merit in a wider political, economic and strategic context they have, viewed from Aden, given Nasser a shot in the arm just when he needed it most and when we would have least wished to give it to him.⁸

The Commander in Chief's final despatches from Aden are a mix of frustration, realism, recognition of the brutal local situation and pride at the professionalism of the British military persevering in the face of ever-increasing adversity. It is significant that by 1967 he had come to define his mission in terms of achieving one goal: withdrawal. The local conditions were merely to have "some prospect for stability." There was no appetite displayed in LeFanu's reports for a MOD internal inquiry into the conflict or any suggestion that a comprehensive, cross-government review was needed. The old policies pursued of building a stable, friendly Federation of South Arabia that would support an enduring British military presence in the Middle East were abandoned if not forgotten. The new policy—with-

drawal—had been embraced and achieved. Therefore, why suggest the campaign was a defeat or answer any questions about what went wrong? Can we not be content with a successful withdrawal? Fortunately General Alan Brooke did not take the same view when he returned to the UK to rebuild the British Army to repel a German invasion after his pivotal role in retrieving the BEF from France in 1940.

It is an interesting question that participants in failed COIN campaigns are allowed to avoid the same introspection as commanders who fail in ‘conventional’, inter-state wars. This may be an important cultural shift to make, again, within the British Army as few would deny the lessons learned by Alan Brooke’s army or the British and Indian forces in the Far East.

The True Legacy of South Arabia: Outright Denial, Wishful

Thinking or a Lack of Introspection?

So what is the problem with the British military choosing to avoid self-critical reflection in the South Arabian campaign—particularly when there were successes to enjoy in Malaya and Oman? A very coherent argument for self-reflection into the performance in South Arabia was offered by a Maj-Gen Sir John Willoughby, a senior figure in the conflict. He provided a succinct explanation of why introspection was constructive:

These “police actions,” internal security operations and counter-insurgency campaigns—call them what you will—always seem to follow the same pattern, almost the same programme. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the story is therefore always the same, and empty of new lessons; or that the precedents of the past can ever be taken for granted.⁹

There are more recent examples that suggest the South Arabian campaign has relevance. There are echoes of the South Arabian situation in the British withdrawal from Basra City in 2007 and even in the current NATO strategy of withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan in 2014. The similarity is the change in objective being sought from creating positive conditions that support our national policy objectives to acceptance of the conditions as they are and focusing on withdrawal of military forces altogether as the goal being sought. This is a shift from campaigning to impose your will on the enemy, and environment, to a campaign focused primarily on your own departure. This is a recurring theme in COIN. Former General Officer Commanding Multi-national Division South East (MND

(SE)) General Sir Richard Shirreff was unequivocal in describing the strategic situation he faced in Basra in 2006 and the perception in the UK:

Well, it was pretty clear to me that—and in a sense, you are now looking over the period as a whole of my time in command—we had a strategy that involved extraction rather than necessarily achieving mission success. It was, in a sense, an exit strategy rather than a winning strategy. A winning strategy was going to require significant additional resources....My sense was that the overriding theme within PJHQ [Permanent Joint Headquarters] within London was, as I say, accelerated transition and that the gravity of the situation was not fully appreciated. As I say, the focus was to exit rather than achieving adequate success.¹⁰

Redefining the political objective as successful withdrawal should not shield anyone from confronting the truth that in doing so we (the counter-insurgent) have failed to achieve our original political objectives through the use of force and, more importantly, the enemy has somehow prevailed. After recognising this uncomfortable truth, the key issue is actively looking for answers as to how and why it happened and what must be learned. The withdrawal from Afghanistan must prompt an internal review within the US and UK militaries of individual and collective performance that is comprehensive and apolitical. The example from the South Arabia campaign suggests that such a review would offer lessons at the tactical, operational and strategic echelons across all components within the military—not least within intelligence.

Intelligence Performance in South Arabia—Strategic Factors

There are seven key strategic factors that contributed significantly to the intelligence community struggling in the South Arabia campaign: one, the complacency in existing colonial institutions; two, the slow pace of change within the British bureaucracy; three, overstretch of British resources across the globe; four, lack of unity between the Foreign Office and Colonial Office in the region; five, lack of understanding of local customs, politics, religion and culture within the British military; six, failure to authorise and prioritise close work with local allies; seven, the lack of consensus within British politics that resulted in the strategic U-Turn and departure from South Arabia.

Complacency may be a factor common to the governing authorities at the beginning of all COIN campaigns. It is hard to think of any campaign in which the government has initially been effective and its intel-

ligence apparatus competent. Almost by definition they must be failing in some way otherwise an insurgency would not be able to develop and challenge the status quo. Nevertheless the atmosphere of “nine to five” observed by Prendergast in October 1965 within a Special Branch that had been ripped apart by the NLF is impossible to condone. The key lesson here is not just to avoid a complacent culture but also have the courage to admit and confront it when events show your organization to be inadequate or out of its depth.

The insidious effects of complacency probably influenced the lethargic pace of change within the Colonial Office bureaucracy that ran the conflict. However, it is not fair to lay blame solely with that organization. The surviving documentation clearly shows that the JIC and Chiefs of Staff in Whitehall recognised in Jan-Mar 1965 that Special Branch was ineffective and therefore little intelligence work was occurring. Yet it took until Oct 1965 for the British bureaucracy to agree on dispatching Prendergast from Hong Kong just to audit the intelligence organization in Aden and make recommendations for change. That is a stunningly slow decision making cycle that was woefully inadequate for defeating the NLF and EIS. The key lesson here is achieving an appropriate sense of urgency across government to defeat your opponent and having the will to push the supporting bureaucracy to meet those raised standards.

The lack of available British resources not already committed to an important task somewhere else in the world also comes across in the surviving documentation. When the Colonial Office was struggling to find suitably qualified Special Branch officers to send to Aden it was apparent that this was an organization in which one experienced Arab speaking detective was worth his weight in gold but also the lack of depth within the organization. The lesson here is development of appropriate skills within the intelligence community and ruthless prioritisation of where they are deployed.

For a country that was capable very early on of recognising the true opponent in South Arabia as Nasser’s Arab nationalist regime in Egypt, it is rather surprising that unity of effort could not be achieved between the Foreign Office (FO) and Colonial Office (CO). Even if the issue of who should command of the British-led mercenary force conducting an unconventional warfare campaign against the Egyptians and their Republican allies in Sanaa is put to one side, the failure of the FO and CO to achieve unity of effort on their approach Yemen was very poor. To have the FO arguing in favour of recognising the new regime in Sanaa in the hope of improving relations with Nasser while the other argued just as fiercely against recognition due to its opposition to Nasser’s policy in South Ara-

bia suggests that unity of effort was a distant prospect for the British state. The key lesson here is unity of command and unity of effort—particularly for the national intelligence agencies as they pursue operations across a wider region. For the latter it is essential that their efforts be prioritised to meet a clear strategic approach and set of objectives. Within that context the military in a COIN can then integrate with the national agencies and leverage their support for the campaign in their (necessarily) more narrow area of territory.

When deteriorating conditions compelled British military forces to become directly involved in providing security, and fighting the insurgency, the lack of Arab language skills was an immediate barrier between the counter-insurgent and the local populace. The situation was compounded by the absence of any cultural or political understanding of the Arabs beyond the superficial level of issuing cards that translated words of command into Arabic. This is not a criticism of the British Army's tactical performance in South Arabia. Rather the lesson here is that the deployment of large numbers of conventional forces into an environment in which they have little or no understanding, or familiarity, is not likely to result in improved collection of intelligence. To the credit of the British units in Aden, they recognised their problem and developed their own plain clothes units to remedy it. However, the rest of their reporting showed an understandable focus on counting the number of incidents in their AO each day and tracking the local pattern of life. This is comparable to the modern issue of intelligence staff focused on SIGACTs rather than understanding the whole environment as noted in the Flynn report.¹¹ To turn the ground holding units into a more sophisticated force it is necessary to improve language skills and awareness of local culture and politics. The latter skills are more consistent with Special Forces; this point suggests an additional lesson: unless absolutely necessary, aim to fight a COIN campaign with Special Forces and local allies. Keep conventional military units in supporting roles. If the latter must be used then their ability to interact with the population to gain intelligence on the enemy and terrain must be factored into the operational approach at the outset as it will not happen by happy accident.

Despite the efforts by the former High Commissioner Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, and the many brave young Political Advisors out on their own in the Protectorates, an intelligence organization for the whole of South Arabia was never achieved. As McCarthy noted in December 1965 there was no intelligence machinery for the whole country and much lay fallow in the WAP and EAP. Even in the Richards report in November 1964 it was noted that deserters from the Yemeni army rarely made it back to the

Interrogation Center in Aden as the local tribal Sheikhs would treat them as guests! The disjointed intelligence organization in South Arabia reflected the structural problems within the would-be Federation. However, that does not mean it was beyond redemption. During the same period that the British failed to achieve a coherent intelligence organization in Aden and the Protectorates the NLF, with support from the EIS, achieved a dominant position in both territories. Their success was aided by the incoherence of the British intelligence apparatus that was more or less blind to their manoeuvre. The key lesson here is that some kind of intelligence organization that accounts for local capabilities must be established over the whole of the theatre of operations—no matter how awkward that is to accomplish. Failure to do so invites the enemy to build up their strength in the shadows and seize the initiative.

The final strategic point is the lack of domestic political consensus within the UK; this was the critical moment in the campaign—the point when British politicians effectively gave up. The impact on the intelligence effort was certainly substantial—as previously indicated, there was little incentive for the local populace to provide any information when they knew the counter-insurgent was leaving and would do nothing to help the would-be local government. There is an additional factor worth considering: the moral component for the military forces still present in the campaign: what was the point in them pursuing their task (intelligence or any other) if departure was only a matter of time? This issue was confronted by Admiral LeFanu in his final report:

Knowing that one's days are numbered has a psychological effect in the amount of force that is used to meet a given situation and in one's judgement as to what constitutes legal or illegal action by the local population. There is substance in the theory, first defeat your terrorist and then let him know he will be independent. It is easier to apply the rules strictly when there is no apparent intention of withdrawing.¹²

LeFanu rightly identifies the psychological factors in executing a fighting withdrawal in a COIN campaign with the implicit point that it asks a great deal of those risking their lives in such circumstances. It also means your prospects for quality, or even any, intelligence have dramatically diminished. The above statement by LeFanu was an impressively indirect way of telling the head of the British military and political masters that a COIN campaign is best fought by actually trying to win rather than withdrawing to a publically stated timeline. The implicit latter criticism seems to have been left hanging in the air. The issue of reluctance to engage in an official

review of performance is returned to in the final section. First, what can be learned within the intelligence domain?

Lessons from the Int Cycle in the South Arabia Campaign

Direction

Not until mid-1965 was a leader appointed as the sole focus for security issues within the Emergency. With the appointment of the GOC Middle East Land Forces (MELF) as the “Security Commander” with responsibility for control of the Emergency there was a degree of clarity on who was in charge of the security aspect of counter-insurgency.¹³ However, this did not synchronise the security component with the overall political framework. Unlike Malaya, there was no combination of High Commissioner and Director of Operations in one appointment. The consequences of this late and inadequate examination of the British command structure in South Arabia was that there was a dangerous lack of clarity on who was driving the Int Cycle. Was the Chief of Intelligence responsible to the High Commissioner, the Commander in Chief Middle East Command or to GOC MELF? If the answer was yes to all, then what was the priority for resources? The lack of clarity on who was in charge was reflected in the differences between Prendergast and McCarthy over centralized control and the friction between political and security intelligence.

The other key issue that adversely affected the Int Cycle from the beginning was the lack of vision by all involved on the nature of the problem. The terms of the Emergency were focused on the threat to security triggered by the attempted assassination of the High Commissioner on 10 December 1963. The nature of the problem though went much wider; it encompassed Egyptian and Republican Yemen subversion within South Arabia and the credibility of the British political effort to help their local allies build a functioning state in South Arabia. Yet the mandate for the intelligence organization was focused on terrorism. Consequently, little or no intelligence apparatus was established in the rural Protectorates leaving British forces blind to the emerging threat of the Egyptian-controlled NLF as the latter moved from rural to urban phases. The memoirs and primary source documents of High Commissioner Sir Kennedy Trevaskis make it abundantly clear that he did understand the link between Aden and the rulers of the rural areas that comprised the original Federation Government. British Generals of the period were also far from ignorant of British colonial COIN conflicts or the trend in Communist thinking that emphasised the linked rural-urban insurgency. Somehow the military and civilian leadership failed to pool their knowledge to develop a more holistic under-

standing of the entire theatre and thereby missed a major factor—the rural urban link—for their intelligence organization to collect against.

Finally, there was little or no direction to the intelligence organization to develop strong links with their allies in the Federation government. The lack of an intelligence apparatus within the latter was noted in late 1965 when the Prendergast review was circulating around Whitehall. By that point it was felt that time was against them so only a small investment was deemed prudent. A key lesson for future operations is to consider developing this at the start of your own campaign and have a plan for how the two organizations will interact and eventually merge.

Collection

At no point in the surviving documentation is there any sign of a formal estimate of the operational environment by the intelligence staff in Middle East Command or an equivalent document by the Colonial Office. It may well be that this was done—perhaps informally. However, the lack of coherence in the collection of intelligence suggests that the intelligence organization approached its position in an ad hoc manner as it dealt with an ever worsening crisis. The actions taken by the various civilian and military members of the intelligence community in South Arabia suggest two structural problems: one, a reliance on human intelligence as the only means of collecting on the NLF and FLOSY; two, little coordination of what they did collect by the various improvised human intelligence collection capabilities.

The latter issue was most telling in Aden when army units set up their own plain clothes surveillance teams. It was an ingenious, and brave, innovation but the name given to them—“Special Branch”—highlighted the inadequacy of the organization that should have been fulfilling that role. The coordination of the SAS, Aden Special Branch and Army Special Branch units was noted as not being particularly good by contemporaries. Aside from being a matter of basic tactical coordination it indicates the lack of coordination within the HUMINT domain.

The reliance on a single source of collection is in itself a significant problem in a COIN campaign. Corroboration by other forms of intelligence is lost and the risk of collection bias increases significantly. The enemy’s vulnerability plays as large a part in which collection method is pursued by the counter-insurgent as does the quality of the collection assets available to the latter. Conditions will always depend on each theatre but certain vulnerabilities persist: insurgents, like any other organization, must have meetings and communicate. For example, if the insurgency is in a rural area it may be entirely reliant upon radio communications to organise

attacks and is therefore vulnerable to Electronic Warfare. In a highly literate society facing terrorism from very secretive small cells aware of communications security risks it may only be HUMINT that offers any access into the organization. However, that does not excuse the counter-insurgent from proactively seeking new ways of collecting against the insurgency to gain corroboration and greater insight. It is particularly important to keep reviewing and adapting your own collection as the enemy is likely to adapt their own techniques as they react to your own actions. Any advantage you have in a collection method is likely to only ever be temporary or partial; there is no room for 'Collection Agency Trade Unionism' as individual intelligence organizations refuse to cooperate and jealously guard their own influence.

In South Arabia, HUMINT was the primary method yet the authorities were aware of Egyptian control of the organization from nearby Taiz in Republican Yemen with a support network running through the rural territories in the WAP. It is hard to believe that none of this was done without electronic communications—this was a significant opportunity for intelligence collection that does not seem to have featured in the campaign to any great extent. If it was done but the material has not yet been declassified, then where was the link providing reporting from the strategic collection assets tracking communications to the counter-insurgents operating at the tactical level? The responsibility for all of the above should have sat squarely with the Director/Chief of Intelligence yet there is little sign of formal mechanisms to ensure it occurred effectively and efficiently. This is an important area worthy of further study as the coordination of strategic and tactical intelligence collection and dissemination of intelligence at a useable classification remains an enduring challenge.

Finally the absence of any reference to the army's ground holding units as sources of intelligence is notable from the various reviews of intelligence in Aden. It is particularly odd given the desperate position the British faced where any possible avenue would have been welcome. Tactical intelligence collection from the army could have helped the strategic level but there is no sign this was realised by contemporaries. For example, as the situation worsened in 1966-67 as the NLF and FLOSY fought for control of Aden, the British government desperately sought a negotiated political settlement with someone so they could leave with some dignity. However, as the FLOSY and ATUC leadership was courted by the British authorities the NLF were in the process of winning control of the streets. A surviving picture of a British soldier on patrol in Aden (probably in Sheikh Othman District) suggests that there was evidence available at the tactical level of this struggle.

In the photograph, graffiti was spray painted on the wall behind the soldier. The letters 'NLF' have been crudely crossed-out and the letters 'FLOSY' painted above it. The graffiti on the wall shows the contest between FLOSY and the NLF. When analyzed in conjunction with the Daily Situation Report (SITREP) from the same British unit, it is highly likely that a violent power struggle between the insurgents was going on. Just from looking at it, an intelligence analyst is likely to begin to form an assessment that the NLF is stronger than FLOSY, while they are currently competing with each other for control of the streets. At the very least the evidence from this basic 'framework' of an army patrol activity highlights an area of significance locally, but also with operational and strategic implications—a civil war within the insurgency. Further evidence existed for this FLOSY-NLF conflict that could have been collected and assessed at the tactical echelon.

On 5 April 1967, the 1 RNF Daily SITREP revealed a fascinating pattern of violence: of the sixteen total incidents six were definitely not against the British military, or Aden police, but were against unknown targets within the local community; this includes pistol shots and grenade attacks. In comparison there were only four attacks against the British military and only one confirmed attack against the local police.¹⁴ It shows the degree of insecurity for the local population due to the on-going violence and also that the insurgents were engaged in selective violence directed at someone other than the occupiers. The use of pistol attacks suggests a degree of focus in targeting consistent with selecting specific individuals rather than indiscriminate violence. If there had been a better coordinated intelligence organization then the intelligence available from these ground holding units could have been processed to provide Britain's strategic decision makers with an assessment of who was winning the intra-insurgent civil war and therefore who to try and bargain with.

Processing

Perhaps the greatest missed opportunity of the South Arabia Campaign was the creation of a centralized intelligence organization—the AIC, but the total failure to make it work effectively. The apparent inadequacy of the AIC was seemingly well-known within theatre even if it did take until the Prendergast report in Nov 1965 for Whitehall to be told in blunt terms the extent of the problem. The debate between McCarthy and Prendergast on the alleged split between political and security intelligence, plus their divergence of views on the scope of the Chief of Intelligence's role, indicated a conceptual problem as well as poor execution. It is significant that separating political and security intelligence from each other was not

an enduring lesson taken into doctrine by the British Army post-Aden. The basis of McCarthy's argument that the Chief of Intelligence's charter was difficult to fulfil is no doubt valid. However, on balance the benefits of pushing for centralized control, coupled with unity of effort within the intelligence community, as suggested by Prendergast and Cowper is probably the better approach. McCarthy's approach separated violence from the political context of the conflict; that is a basic conceptual blunder in any war as it breaks the essential link between the use of force and the desired political goals. If followed through it would have left the military counting incident reports in a political vacuum while the political advisors had little understanding of the true local balance of power at the very moment they tried to identify the key insurgent groups needed to form a national unity government.

To achieve the suggested standard of centralized control it is necessary to have the right intelligence architecture across the theatre. This was a point on which McCarthy and Prendergast agreed. Both noted the existence of intelligence material in the Protectorates but the lack of appropriate 'plumbing' to get it back to the analysts at the AIC. A common agreement was that the analysts responsible for those regions needed to leave the AIC in Aden and be relocated in Mukalla and Al Ittihad respectively. This is a valid lesson consistent with the theme in the Flynn report that stresses the importance of moving analysts out into the field to gain context and improve understanding.¹⁵ If Prendergast's suggestion had been implemented then the overall intelligence architecture in South Arabia would have had three intelligence "fusion" cells, each located in its own area of operations as fitted the actual flow of information based on local power structures. The Chief of Intelligence would still have provided the centralized control and guidance from Aden but would have done so from a better position due to the improved structure within the overall organization. In short, better three all-source analysis ('Fusion') Intelligence Cells working in three AOs supporting one theatre level 'Fusion' Cell than have one weak, poorly connected 'Fusion' Cell that is totally ineffective.

The quality of the intelligence produced by the AIC is worth further research and analysis; from the overall tone of the perspectives from the Political Advisors, Special Branch and the army unit war diaries it does not seem to have covered itself in glory. However, without direct access to their output it is not possible to assess the quality of their intelligence product. From the detail in the regular MEC newsletters back to the UK there was clearly a decent understanding of the extent of Egyptian support, the capabilities of the NLF and the broad trends within the civil war between the NLF and FLOSY. However, where did this come from? Did the

AIC achieve enough detail for intelligence to be actioned by ground holding units or the CT team in Special Branch? Did the AIC provide sound understanding of the enemy threat for the Aden Brigade based on analysis of attack trends and NLF capabilities? Was GOC MELF provided with advance warning of major NLF attacks or subversion with the Federal Regular Army? How did the national intelligence agencies interact with the AIC? This is an area worth further research and study as the lessons from the AIC are likely to be relevant to contemporary experience in the military intelligence community.

Dissemination

The final stage of the Int Cycle is often assumed to be easy; there are usually two major challenges in doing it well: achieving the optimal classification and ensuring intelligence can flow up and down the echelons of command in a concise form but without losing any accuracy or insight. The South Arabia campaign was no exception with two specific local issues challenging effective dissemination: first, the extent to which intelligence from the tactical units bearing on the deteriorating situation within the local security forces, and more generally in Aden, reached the operational and strategic echelons. Second, the extent to which the insight provided from highly classified material collected by the national intelligence agencies reached those facing the terrorists at the tactical level. Again, this is an area that requires further research as there are more questions than answers: did any of the commanders on the ground understand who their enemy was by 1967 even though the JIC had been writing about EIS support for the NLF since Jan 1965? Why did senior leadership in the UK think the FRA was fine when the intelligence reporting was very clear that they were not? The key lessons from the South Arabia campaign is the importance of investing in the infrastructure for dissemination and having a culture of intellectual honesty to honestly, and bluntly, share unwelcome information.

Institutional Learning

A key goal in this thesis was to examine the extent to which the UK military—particularly the Intelligence Corps—attempted to formally learn lessons from its experience in the South Arabian campaign. Unfortunately, it was not possible to do so due to the lack of material on this specific area found in the declassified documents within the National Archive and the Intelligence Corps Archive. Further investigation may well identify a body of official documentation that analysed the military, or intelligence, performance in South Arabia. However, what is clear is there was no public,

or private, admission of failure nor a position taken that a defeat had been suffered that requiring officially-sanctioned reflection.

The final official reports from MEC showed no interest in prompting institutional learning. Admiral LeFanu signed off in his final Newsletter to the UK Chiefs of Staff with some telling observations about the campaign—including the failure of intelligence to come to grips with the problem. As noted above, he did not call for an MOD review or cross-government enquiry. Why should he? The withdrawal was successful. The previous three years of the Emergency were airbrushed away so no lessons need be learned in why the UK's use of force failed to impose its will on the enemy and achieve the desired original policy.

From the absence of evidence of any internal reviews in the surviving documentation, this attitude seems to have been prevalent at the tactical level as well. The official unit diary of 1 RNF in 1967 shows no mention of any after action review or post-operational report when they returned to the UK. In fact, the 1 RNF Unit Diary barely skips a beat as they return from Aden; in September they are conducting battalion training and preparing for public duties in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne as Her Majesty the Queen visits the area. Internal security, counter-insurgency and Aden are not mentioned again.¹⁶ For a unit on the receiving end of the FRA Mutiny on 22 June 1967 it is odd that there was no official reflection on what to learn from the experience.

The Intelligence Corps can claim no great success in institutional learning either. From the documentation found on the South Arabian Campaign there is no material present that indicates a formal, officially-sanctioned review of its performance in South Arabia took place. The bulk of material that does exist shows that aside from one officer who was particularly proactive in providing his own notes and papers, there was little institutional curiosity about the campaign. A perfunctory examination of the catalogue of articles that have appeared in the in-house journal of the Intelligence Corps "The Rose and Laurel" shows only one article on Aden—by the same officer who donated his notes once he was a Brigadier. There are also many more articles written on sporting activities and adventure training than there are on how intelligence performed in any campaigns (other than World War Two).¹⁷ A lack of intellectual curiosity about its own profession is a troubling trait for an institution that requires critical thinking, analysis and assessment as a core skill. It may be that it is completely "normal" within British military culture to spend as little time as possible asking difficult questions and seeking some guidance, if not outright answers, from history. However, that does not make it any more disappointing that an organization expected to contribute a disproportion-

ate amount of expertise to any future COIN campaign should be so uninterested in its own past experience of attempting to do so. It may be that the picture is not as bleak as suggested above; further research is required, and would be welcome, into Int Corps doctrine and training from 1945 to 2011. As a starting point, it would probably be particularly instructive to examine the performance of military intelligence within the British COIN campaigns in that period and then compare it to the evolution of training and doctrine in the same period. Given the central importance of working with Special Branch, the Colonial Office and the national intelligence agencies in the 1950-70s, it is highly likely there would be insights and lessons for our own time.

Conclusion

The conduct and outcome of the war provides valuable insights into the conduct of foreign policy, development of local alliances and the difficulty of ‘winning’ at COIN when the insurgency has external support in the region. There is also much from a tactical and operational perspective that can be learned from further study of the South Arabia campaign. For example, how to conduct effective counter-insurgent targeting with limited resources in the Arab world; developing an effective, strategically sound exploitation capability; and designing an intelligence organization for your own force and your local ally that fits the ever-changing operational environment.

There is also a moral component that is equally worth examination; allowing a generation of the military to serve in this kind of campaign and yet leave them with feelings of professional and personal frustration is likely to create the conditions that cause poor institutional and individual health. Over the course of researching this thesis two participants in the conflict were interviewed by me. Despite both gentlemen having long and distinguished careers, it was evident that their experience in South Arabia had stayed with them—particularly the sense of frustration at the outcome of the conflict.

As the NATO campaign in Afghanistan draws to a close, perhaps in similar circumstances to the British in South Arabia, it is worth considering the impact of the experience on the institutions themselves and the participants. Just as up-armored vehicles, mine detectors and ISR were worth the investment in the war, some robust, honest critical thinking about our performance in the campaign may be an equally sound investment for the long-term.

Notes

1. Report from the Commander in Chief Middle East to Combined Chiefs of Staff, Middle East Command Newsletter Number 5, 1 July 1966-30 April 1967, 5320/9/CINCME, Annex B, DEFE 11/541, Secret. Declassified records of the Ministry of Defence, the UK National Archives, Kew. Hereafter referred to as "CINC MEC Newsletter".

2. Flynn Report, 13.

3. Paget, *Last Post: Aden*. 123.

4. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 237-238.

5. As early as May 1967 the British representative to South Arabia Lord Shackleton was attempting to broker a government that included the insurgents. In the end, the UK found itself face to face with the NLF rather than handing over to its original allies. See Paget, *Last Post: Aden*, 200-201.

6. CINC MEC Newsletter, Number 6, Secret, 30 November 1967, 4, para 24.

7. Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber*, 237-238.

8. CINC MEC Newsletter Number 4, 5 October 1966, Secret, 6, para 6.

9. The above statement is the opening quote of Major General Willoughby's Forward to Paget. *Last Post: Aden*, 19. Major General Willoughby was a highly respected figure in the South Arabia campaign. He was GOC MELF from May 1965 to May 1967 and therefore provided the key level of leadership in Aden as the "Security Commander" for the Emergency. He proceeds to pay tribute to the sacrifice of British Servicemen and highlights the particular stress of serving in this kind of conflict.

10. Testimony to the UK's Iraq Enquiry by Lieutenant General Sir Richard Shirreff, <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/44178/20100111am-shirreff-final.pdf> (accessed 29 November 2012).

11. Flynn Report, 7-8. For an example of the day to day focus of British Army ground holding units in Aden in 1967 see WO 305/4302, 1 RNF SITREPs from declassified records of the War Office, UK National Archives, Kew.

12. CINC MEC Newsletter Number 6, Secret, 30 November 1967, 4, paragraph 21. Note the date: this was the final Newsletter sent by LeFanu to London as the withdrawal of all British forces from South Arabia was completed.

13. "Operational Executive-Minutes of the 5th meeting held at 10:30am Saturday 15 May 1965 at the Security Secretariat," CO 1035/179, declassified records of the Ministry of Defence, the UK National Archives, Kew.

14. Daily SITREP from 1 RNF to Headquarters Aden Brigade, WO 305/4302, from declassified records of the War Office, the UK National Archives, Kew.

15. Flynn Report, 15.

16. WO 305/4302, Declassified records from the War Office, the UK National Archives.

17. Author's observation following research of article titles in register of "Rose and Laurel" articles.

Glossary

Aden. The colony under British sovereignty; also known as Aden State.

Aden Trades Union Council (ATUC). The organization in Aden responsible for representing the labour force; sponsored by Egypt, ATUC became heavily politicised, anti-British and supported violence and protests during the Emergency.

British Security Service (BSS). More commonly known as MI5, BSS's primary role is in defence of security of the UK mainland. There were links to the colonies through Special Branch.

Colonial Office. The civil service organization within the UK government responsible for administration, government and order within the colonies. They provided the administrative and policing manpower for the colonies and the UK's political leadership in South Arabia.

Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP). The territorial area of various Sheikdoms, Sultanates and tribal territories to the east of Aden that bordered Saudi Arabia and Oman with which the British Crown had treaties but did not exercise direct administrative or military control. The EAP was asked to join the FSA but declined.

Federation Of South Arabia (FSA). The would-be state that by 1963 comprised Aden and the Western Aden Protectorate; intended by the UK and their local allies to gain independence in 1968, retain a British military base and have security treaties with the UK.

Foreign Office. The civil service organization within the UK government responsible for diplomacy. In this period it was separate from the Colonial Office. Critically, within the context of the Emergency, the Foreign Office was the lead department for interaction with Egypt and Yemen.

Front For The Liberation Of South Yemen (FLOSY). The Egyptian-sponsored anti-British insurgent organization within Aden. FLOSY was an attempt to unify the NLF and the Aden trades union movement. The NLF broke away and ultimately prevailed over FLOSY.

High Commissioner. Part of the Colonial Office, the High Commissioner was the highest ranking civilian and effectively the UK's authority in country.

Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). The JIC was the central committee within the UK responsible for intelligence for senior political and military leaders.

Local Intelligence Committee (LIC). The LIC was the JIC's subordinate organization in Aden responsible for intelligence assessments in South Arabia.

Middle East Command (MEC). The UK's tri-service military organiza-

tion commanded by a 3-star officer responsible for the UK presence in the entire Middle East. Under the various British Defence White Papers from 1953-64 it was intended to provide a military response to a global war against the USSR in the event of a global war. After the loss of friendly territory in Israel and Egypt in the 1950s the UK decided on Aden as the most appropriate location for MEC.

Middle East Land Forces (MELF). The land component within MEC. From July 1965 onwards the General Officer Commanding MELF was also responsible for the security aspects of the Emergency.

National Liberation Front (NLF). The insurgent group in South Arabia that ultimately prevailed over the UK, Federation of South Arabia and FLOSY. They too were sponsored by the Egyptian Intelligence Services but generated a political narrative of being an indigenous, “nationalist” resistance.

Political Agent or Advisor. The UK’s advisor to local tribal leaders in the EAP and WAP. A civil servant from the Colonial Office, the Political Agent/Advisor worked alone with little or no protection other than the terms of the original treaty agreed with the local tribal leader.

Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). More commonly known as MI6, the primary role for SIS in the context of the Aden Emergency was counter-espionage and counter-intelligence against the Egyptian Intelligence Services supporting the NLF and FLOSY. SIS was also active within Republican Yemen.

Special Branch (SB). Part of the UK police force structure in the UK mainland and in the colonies, Special Branch was responsible for counter-terrorism, counter-subversion, political intelligence and support to the national intelligence agencies as requested. In the colonies the tradition was to recruit members of the local population as well as British citizens. The combination of local knowledge and British expertise was often very effective; Aden Special Branch was the first organization targeted by the NLF in their terrorist campaign.

Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). The territorial area of various tribal territories surrounding Aden. The British Crown did not exercise direct administrative or military control. The WAP combined to form the Federation of South Arabia in 1962.

Appendix of Figures

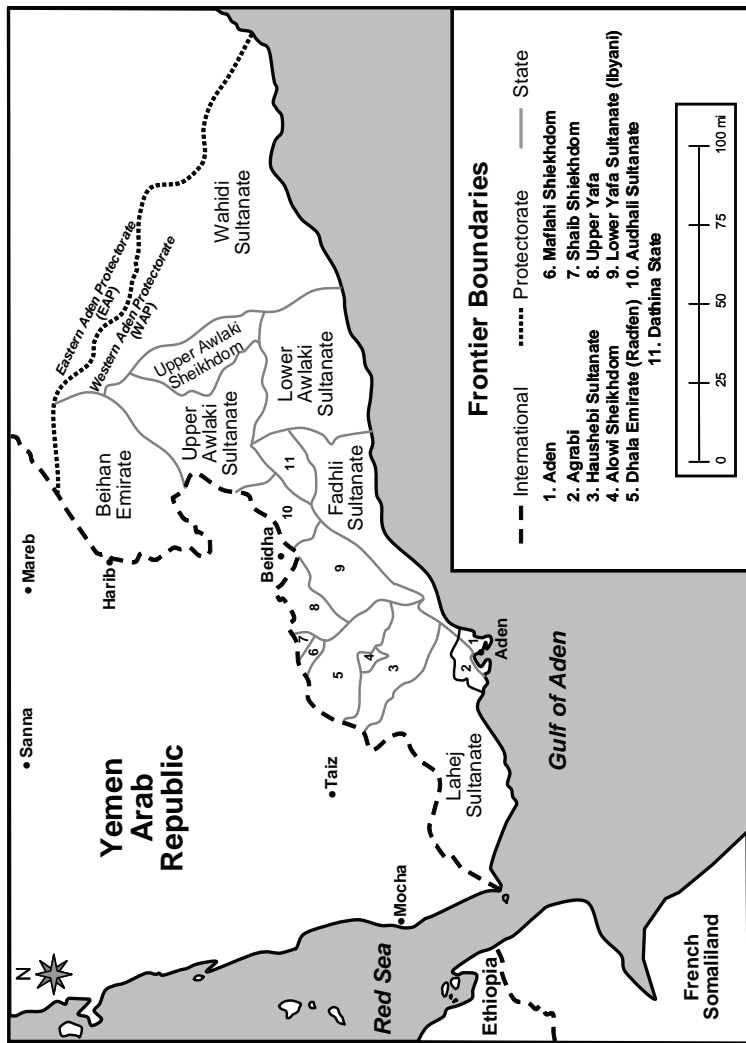


Figure 1. The Arabian Peninsula in 1965: Republican Yemen and the Federation of South Arabia.

Source: Created by Author.

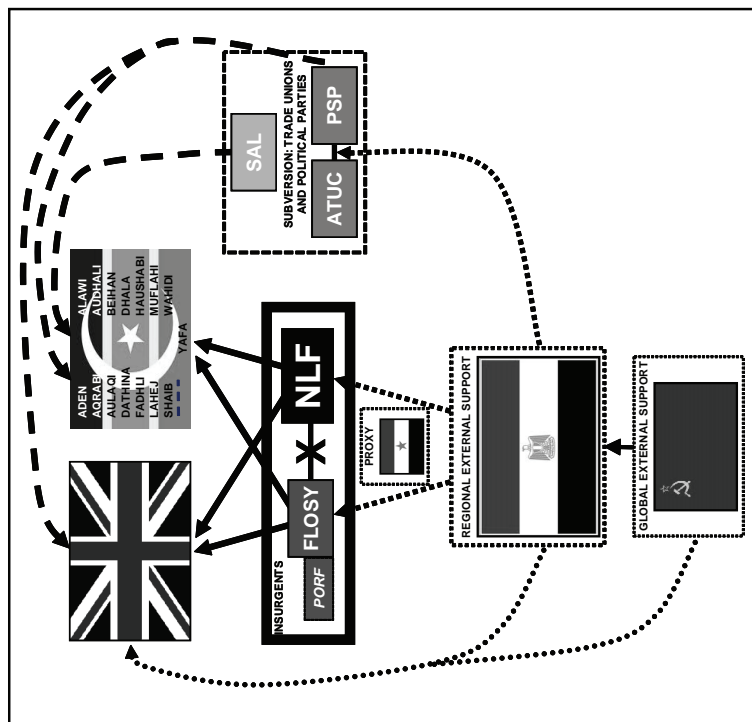


Figure 2. The Anti-UK, Anti-FSA Forces: Insurgents, Trade Unions, Political Parties and External Sponsors.

Source: Created by Author.

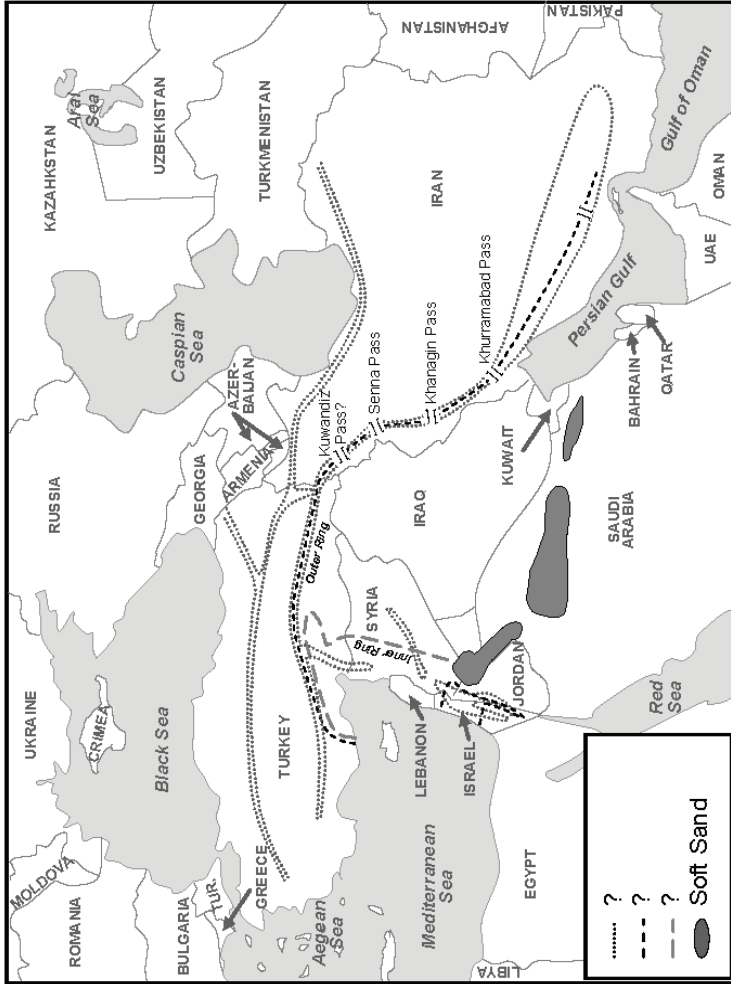


Figure 3. UK Defense of Middle East in the Event of a Further Global War, 1953, Number 65.⁵²

Source: Created by Author.

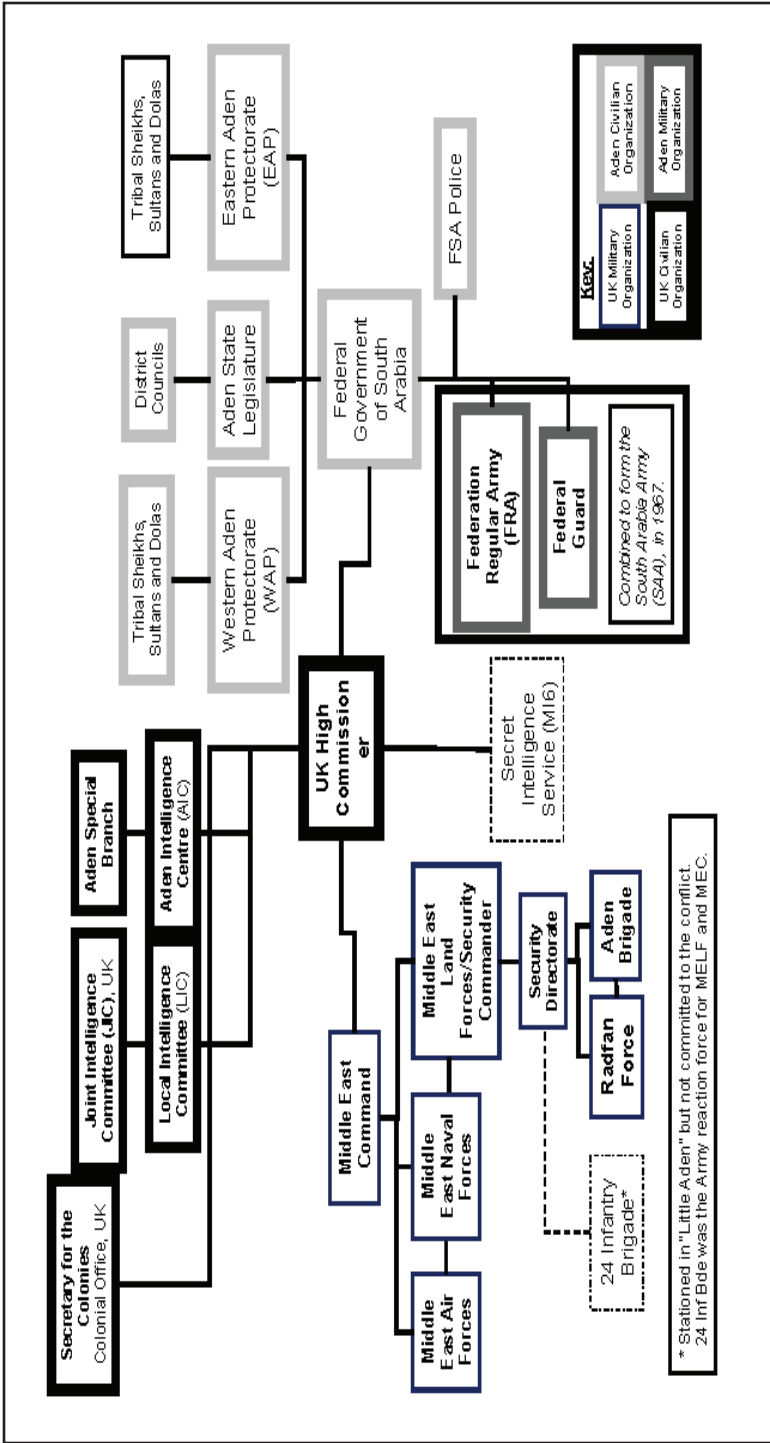


Figure 4. British and Federation of South Arabia Political, Military and Intelligence Organizations in South Arabia, 1963-7.

Source: Created by Author.

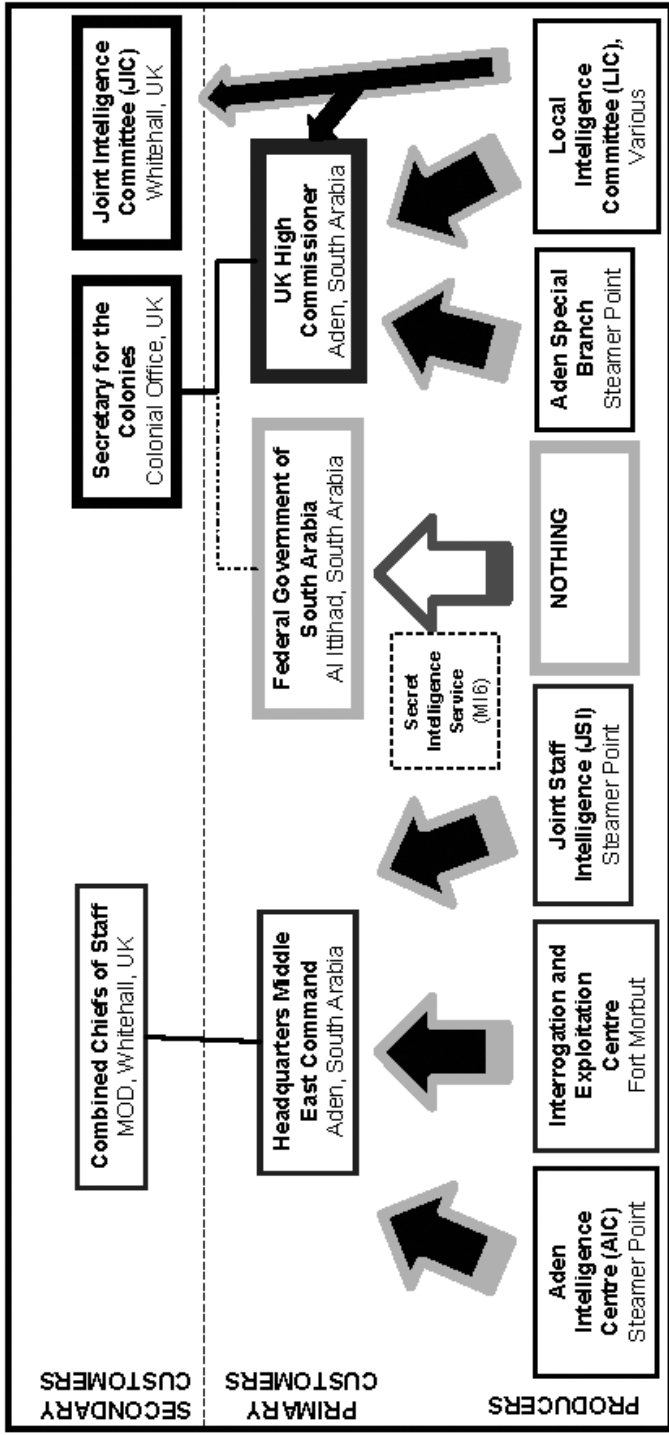


Figure 5. UK and Federation Intelligence Organizations in South Arabia, 1963-67.

Source: Created by Author.

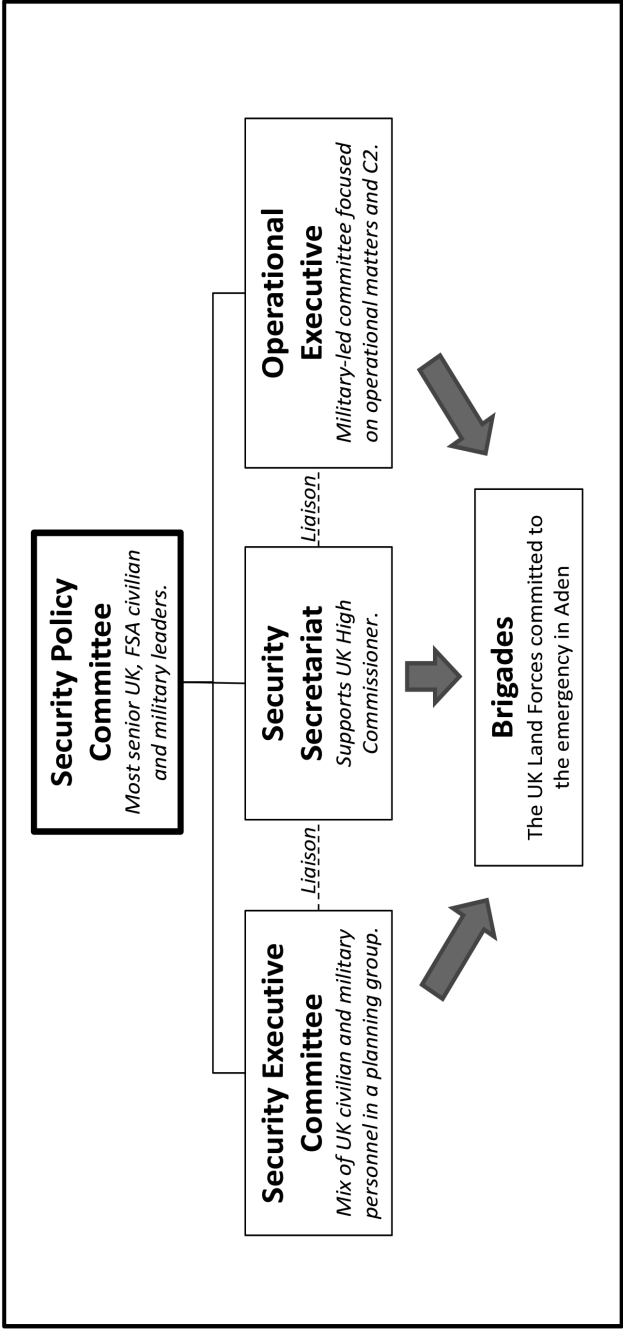


Figure 6. UK Security Forces C2 in Aden, 1965-February 1967.

Source: Author's own diagram based on Julian Paget, *Last Post*, 130-1.⁵²

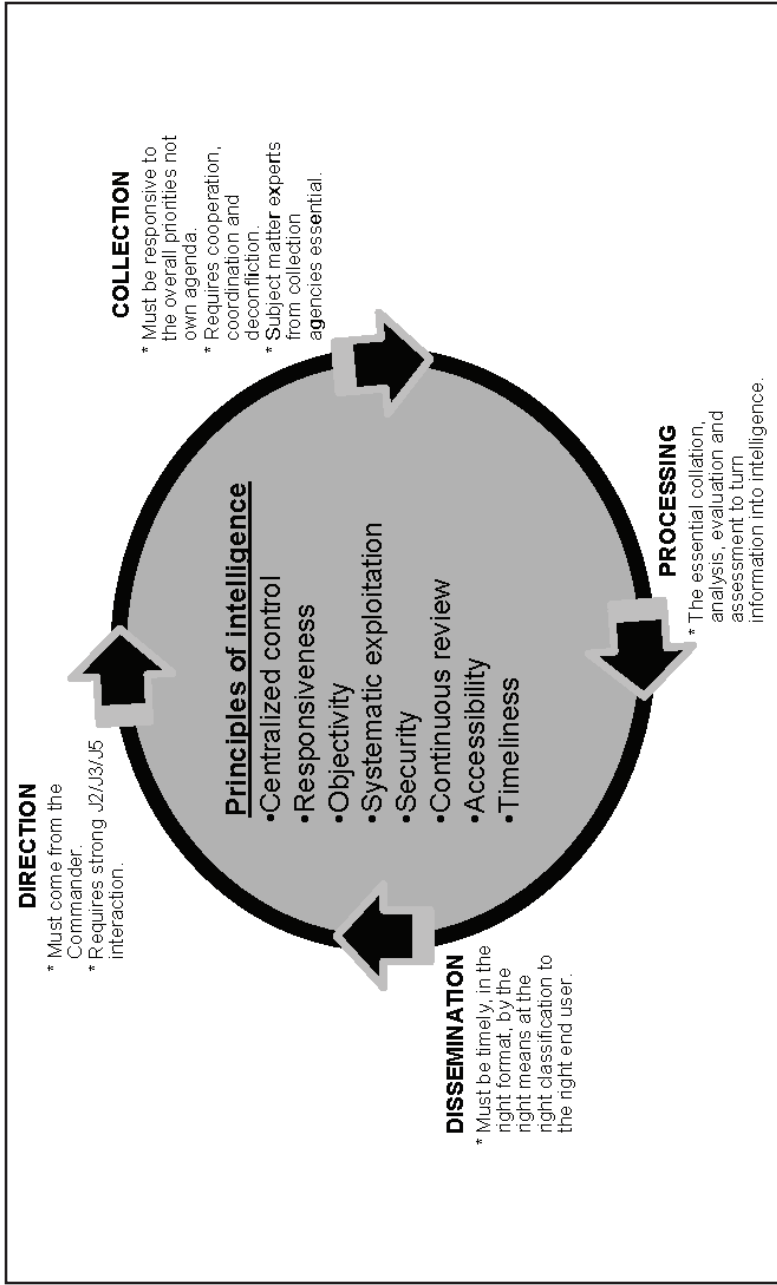


Figure 7. The British Army's "Intelligence Cycle" Model.

Source: Created by Author.

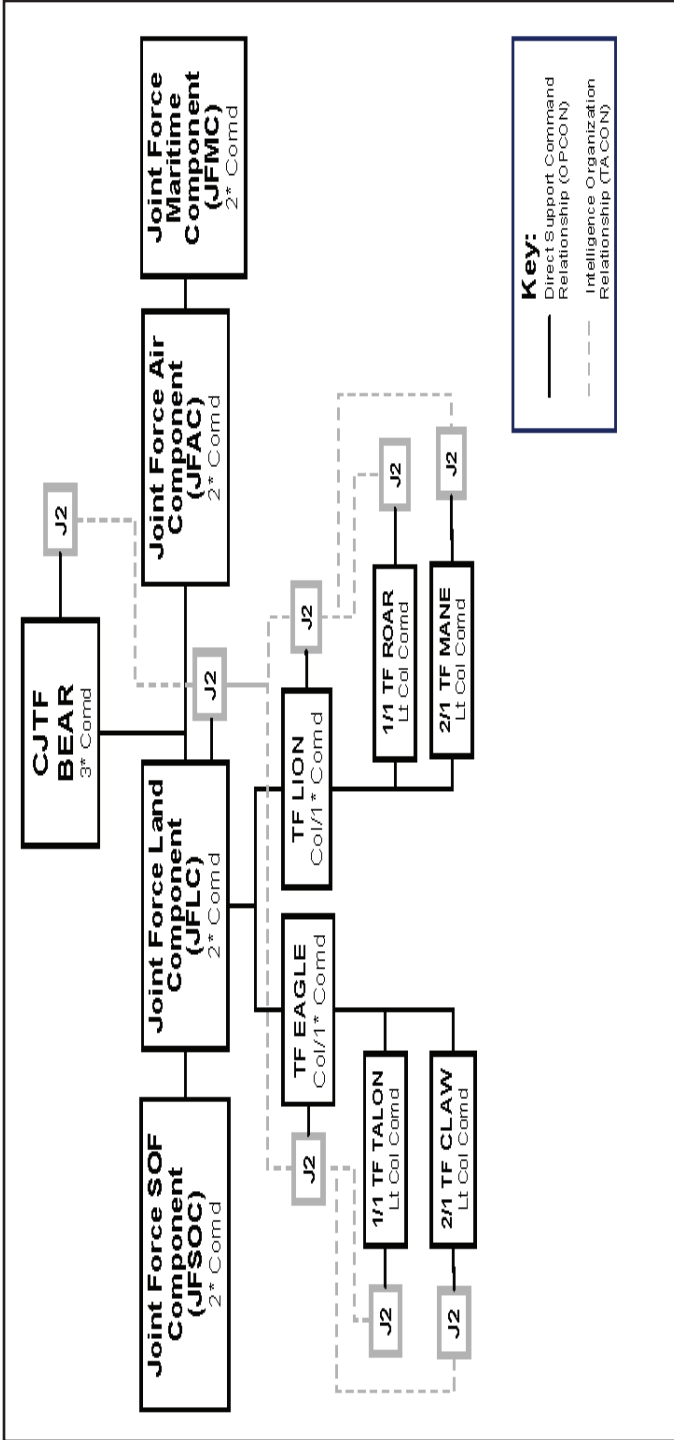


Figure 8. An Example of a Combined Joint Task Force with Supporting J2 Elements.

Source: Created by Author.

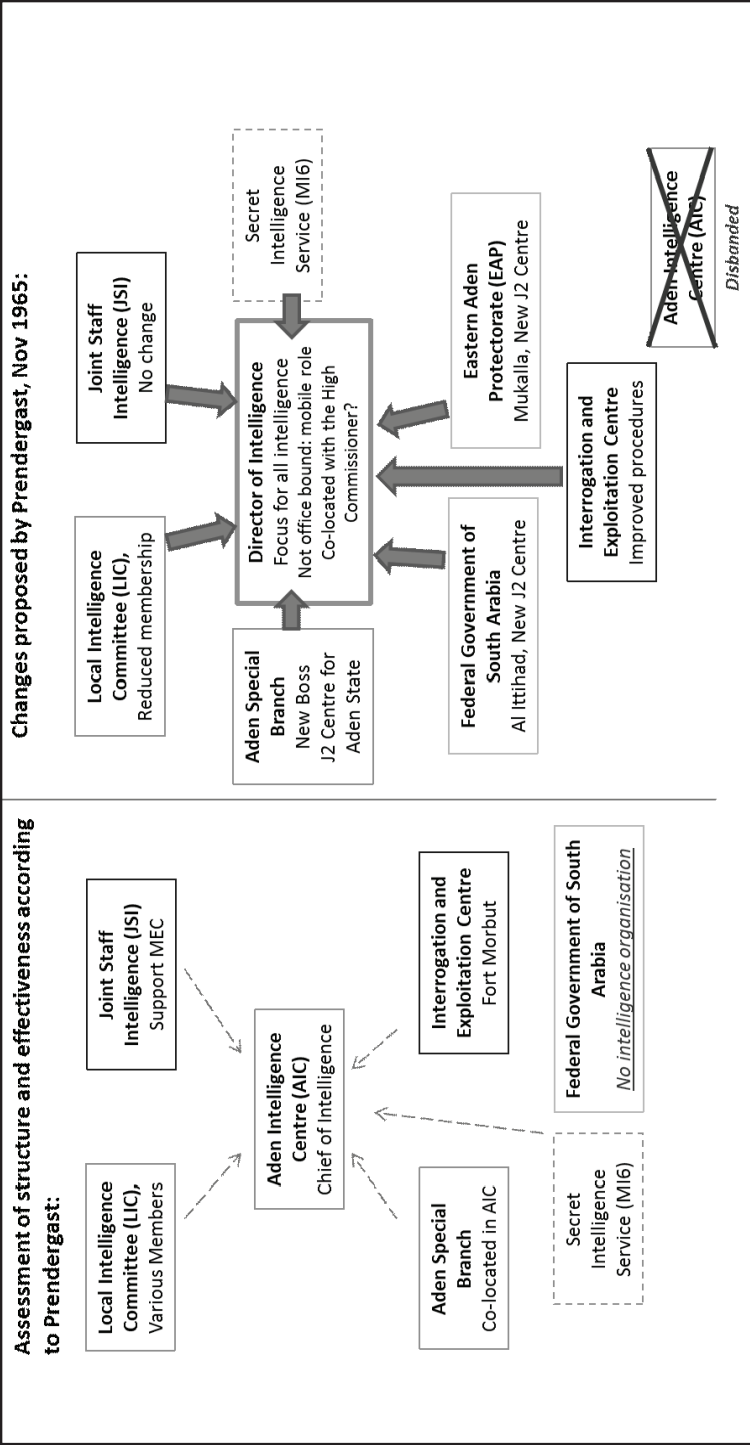


Figure 9. Prendergast's Assessment of Intelligence Organization in South Arabia and Proposal for Change, November, 1965.

Source: Created by Author.

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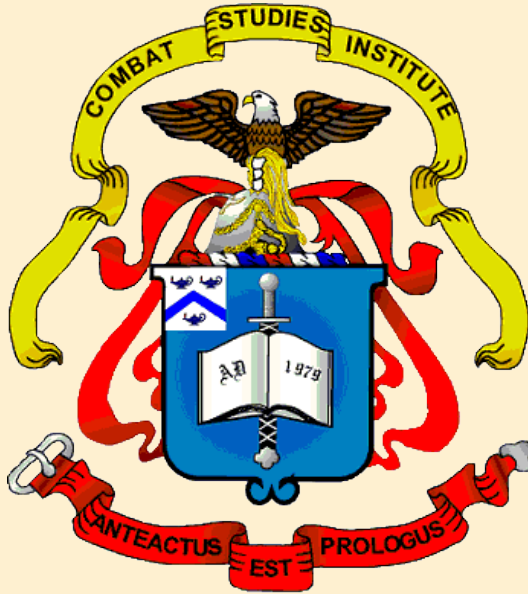
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