The Desert is Neutral: An Analysis of British Policymaking in Oman during the Reign of Said bin Taimur (1934–1970)

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Abstract

Oman has played an essential but peripheral role in the British Empire. Colonial endeavours in Oman were mixed, both fruitful and limited. These efforts exemplify how British colonialism in the area developed and how policymaking evolved based on context, ideology, or conflict. Many of these ideological differences came from the British need for oil, to secure it and to compete with the other powers involved in the Middle East. This thesis will analyse British documentation under the reign of Said bin Taimur to understand how these facets of British policymaking in Oman developed and how the development of this state was to the benefit of the British. Existing studies have examined the British in Oman, but from the perspective of military history and occupation or in a wider survey work context. This project focuses on the diplomatic, bureaucratic, and institutional nexus that guided the creation of the Omani state and its infrastructure to the benefit of the British establishment and oil companies. This thesis will examine this nexus in detail to examine how its expression influenced the development of the relationship between the Omani Sultanate and the British.

Cover image: The Sultan interested in Tanks after demonstration in Aldershot, Britain, 1938.

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Abbreviation List

APOC – Anglo-Persian Oil Company
FCO – Foreign and Colonial Office
FO – Foreign Office
GOI – Government of India
IOR – Indian Ocean Region
IPC – Iraq Petroleum Company
MOFF – Muscat and Oman Field Force
NDFLOAG – National Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf
NFR – Northern Frontier Regiment
PAM – Political Agent, Muscat
PDO – Petroleum Development Oman
PDRY – Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (Aden)
PFLO – Peoples Front for the Liberation of Oman
PFLOAG – People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf
PRPG – Political Residency/Resident in the Persian Gulf
RAF – Royal Air Force
SAF – Sultan's Armed Forces
SAS – Special Air Service
TOS – Trucial Oman Scouts
TPC – Turkish Petroleum Company
UAE – United Arab Emirates

Chapter 1: Introduction, Historiography, and Context

1. Introduction

"Faith in the hearts of men is always stronger than oil in the heart of the desert."[1] So wrote the Pan-Arabist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, writer for the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. His article went on to lambast the Saudis for their reluctance to join in hostilities against Israel. Relationships between states in the Middle East are complex. The relationship between western countries and Middle Eastern countries has been as complex if not more so. This sentiment that Heikal professes was common for the early twentieth century in Arabia, as differing streams of Islamism, Arab Nationalism, and Pan-Arabism all mixed. Colonialism, in the form of economic colonialism or more traditional settler colonialism, impacted these streams of thought tremendously. This project seeks primarily to understand how British policy in Oman evolved over the period of the early twentieth century, especially with regards to oil and oil companies.

The core research focus of this thesis is to understand the influence that private concerns had on the British posted in Oman, and how this impacted their policies with the Sultan. The relationship between British Colonial Policy, economic development, and the diplomatic corps is one that has been well established. In the Persian Gulf, the British diplomatic corps furthered oil exploitation by leveraging military strength and colonial realpolitik to the benefit of the British. This, however, had the knock-on effect of creating movements in the gulf region that sought to liberate it from British, American, and French influence. This thesis will examine the effect the British had in Muscat and Oman during the reign of Said bin Taimur, between 1934-1970 in detail. It will examine how British diplomatic efforts had only the end goal of oil and perpetuation of British dominance at its core despite how the colonialism created infrastructure or benefitted Oman. By examining the relationships between the British, the Omani Sultanate, oil companies, and the military the linkage between civil development and private interest will become more apparent.

British influence in the Middle East has almost always been from a point of military and diplomatic strength. In the twentieth century, this influence was primarily to create and protect polities that suited British foreign policy, ideological, and economic aims. These aims were chiefly to be independent in oil supply from America. Economically they saw a rich resource, petroleum, in easy reach. The Department of Foreign Affairs played a crucial role in the interfacing of the British within the Gulf through apparatuses like the India Office, the

[1] Translation of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's article in the *Voice of the Arabs* on the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, dated March 9th, 1965, FO 371/179880, p. 35.

Foreign Office, the Middle East Development Division, and the Persian Gulf Residency. This presence diplomatically, was followed by a corporate apparatus set up in a variety of previous Ottoman holdings. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the Turkish Petroleum Company, the Iraq Petroleum Company, as well as a dizzying number of local subsidiaries set up to create a corporate hierarchy were all involved in this state creation and development.

The liaisons between the British government and oil companies created a relationship that would allow for largescale resource extraction. In Iran, the Anglo-Persian oil Company would have a monopoly on oil resources until Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953 partially split oil reserves, and then again in 1979 with the total state take over of oil fields by the Ayatollah.[2] The Trucial States, across the Persian Gulf from the British residency in Bushehr[3], were also of prime interest to the British. From 1820 to 1971, the Trucial States – which consisted of what are now the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and parts of Oman – all had a dependency on the British, as protected entities. This was after the signing of the General Maritime Treaty of 1820 which prevented the local rulers of the Trucial States from raiding the vessels of the British East India Company.[4] British presence was minor until after the Second World War. Oil negotiations changed this considerably and the British diplomatic corps began negotiations in earnest with the Trucial States.[5] Oman became party to this treaty in 1892, as the British wished to seek an end to the piratical, violent, and unpredictable period for IOR (Indian Ocean Region) trade which Oman played a key role in. Omani coastal tribes, Gulf tribes, and Southern Iranian peoples had in the nineteenth century been responsible for a significant amount of commercial uncertainty in the British Raj: as a result, the British forced a maritime concession on these peoples to prevent any further losses. They also sought to gain a greater foothold over people in the Middle East in general, which would eventually evolve into a position of primacy for the British Government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[6]

British presence in Oman has been characterised by the Sultan himself in the 1930s as "an old firm". The British would help establish, support, and develop the Sultanate from almost any angle from the late 1940s to the 1970s and play a key role in the legitimation of

[2] Katayoun Shafiee, *Machineries of oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran*, (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 25–27 https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11023.001.0001.
[3] Also known as Bushire in British parlance
[4] Tancred Bradshaw, *The End of Empire in the Gulf: From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London, 2019), pp. 13–15.
[5] Ibid., pp. 16–19.
[6] Robert Blyth, *The empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa, and the Middle East, 1858–1947*. (London, 2003), p. 35–37.

the Sultanate as sole ruler over the entirety of Oman, interior and exterior. Largely ignored until it became important to the British in the 1950s, Oman was a cornerstone of British policy afterwards. They sought to find a source of oil independent from the Iran, British prestige in the Gulf Area after the First World War was also of significance. The British 'moment' in the Middle East, was at hand in this period, and Oman was a key piece of the moment.

This project seeks to understand the relationship primarily between three entities. The British diplomatic corps (and by extension the British government), the Sultan, and finally the oil companies that fundamentally drove the relationship between the former two. Fundamentally, analysing the role of the British in Oman must scrutinise the dealings of the Foreign Office with the Sultan, the British Foreign Office with the oil companies, and the oil companies with the Sultan. Thankfully, due to the position held by the British Foreign Office in this triangular relationship, most communication between oil companies and the Sultanate involved the Foreign Office as a mediating agent. As such, most documentation makes mention of most if not all three entities simultaneously. With regards to the oil companies, this project will explore how the relationship between the companies and the British saw the British dominate most aspects of Omani governance, from finances to infrastructural development, to the militarisation of the Sultanate. It is important also to state that this is an analysis of the British in Oman, rather than Oman in its totality. Naturally the issues with using British sources instead of Omani sources are one that presents a skewed view of the society from the beginning. Presuppositions on race, religion, and education are markedly present throughout all these documents. This element of the documents is interesting, though it falls into the remit of post-colonial critique and outside this study's main focus.

The intervention of the British military in the Sultanate is a tangential issue for this point however, as the Foreign Office were largely involved in a lesser capacity during periods of conflict in the Sultanate. As such, this project will not deal with the Jebel Akhdar war, or the Coup of 1970 in their execution. Instead, attention will be given to the points immediately before and immediately after the war, and immediately before the Coup. Since this period frames the reign of Said bin Taimur, Sultan from 1934-1970, that is the period which will be the most critically analysed. The Sultan's personal rule, and the context of governance in the Sultanate will also be appraised and explored, as the nature of the Sultans relationships with the tribes of the interior, other sheikhs throughout the Trucial Coast is significant. The Sultanates Relationship with the Imamate will also be explored, albeit in a minor capacity

due to the lack of source material available in the National Archives dealing with the Imamate exclusively.

Ultimately, this project looks to examine British involvement in Oman in detail, and how the country was supported to further British aims in the Middle East in a time of waning empire. The focus of this thesis is to understand the influence that private oil companies had on the British stationed in Oman, and how this impacted how they dealt with the Sultan. Most existing studies deal with the Sultanate in a military capacity, and the British military expression on a much larger grander narrative structure. This study differentiates itself by examining the influence of the Foreign Office on the development of the Omani state in detail. Much of this analysis will be on holdings in a variety of archives that deal with the Foreign Office and generated by the Foreign Office. By analysing the evolution of policy in the Sultanate by the colonial administration of the British can the history of Oman's role in the British system be understood.

2. Sources

There is a myriad of sources available to the researcher with regards to British involvement in Oman. Many of these holdings and archives have been digitized in the past decade. These include the Qatari Digital Library (QDL) and the Arabian Gulf Digital Archive (AGDA). The content of these archives is drawn from the residency of the British Agent in Muscat, the British Residency in Bushehr, as well as other informative memos, correspondence, and the all-important concessionary agreements held in the National Archives Foreign and India Office document series. The documents present in these archives shed light on many successive issues of the British government and their relative position, influence, and policy of the British in Oman during the early twentieth century. The QDL has an extensive collection of these documents digitised from the political residency at Bushehr also.[7] The documents themselves are varied and disorganized; Kew Archives, as primary custodian of these documents, have done an admirable job in organising them and making them more accessible. Thematically speaking the documents relate to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in general to far more specific pieces detailing meetings with sovereigns across the Arabian Gulf, the Middle East, and the Indian Subcontinent.

These are all digitised and have been transcribed using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) allowing for the downloading of and text search within files. The scans and PDFs are of excellent quality and have been the prime resource in the creation of this project. Likewise, the AGDA has all the above documents as well as maps, photographic collections, and cartographic collections that have been made available to the UAE from the National Archives in Kew. These digitised documents provide an invaluable source of reference information and primary sources pertaining to the UAE and the Gulf in general. The AGDA has also made use of OCR in their documentation allowing for much of the same capabilities in search and textual reference as the QDL. Digitising these resources has been a great boon as it has enabled cross-referencing materials gathered from the National Archives at Kew.

Much of the material gathered for this project was collected from the National Archives at Kew. Within the document series, nearly sixty documents were accessed, scanned, and examined to understand the breadth of the British foreign office's actions in Oman. They come from a variety of departments and authors, ranging from May 1919 to December 1973. Over two weeks, documents originating from the Middle Eastern office in

[7] For research based on the archival sources similar to the ones used in this paper please see Dr Francis Owtram, "A Close Relationship: Britain and Oman since 1750", *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/en/close-relationship-britain-and-oman-1750> [accessed 21 October 2022].

Cairo, War Office, the Energy department (then called the Power Department) and the Foreign Office more generally, were critically appraised to understand their value for the project. The most significant benefit of these sources is their sheer volume. The amount of ink and paper dedicated to Oman, and the British institutions involved in the state support and creation is staggering. These sources offer a valuable insight into the order of operation within Oman for the Foreign office. They are largely correspondence, memoranda, and notes and their contents are quite detailed and are ordered extremely well. Their contents also provide important information as to the relevance of Oman within the colonial system. The very language used in these documents offers a perspective within the Foreign Office and allows for a critical appraisal of the relationship between the Foreign Office, oil companies, and the Sultan.

It also allows for an appraisal of how the relationship dynamic worked between the Sultanate and these other colonial parties. The writers of these sources are seasoned Foreign Office bureaucrats, and men who had worked in the Middle East for generations. These sources were held in confidence, and as such they specifically speak candidly about the state of the Sultanate and the nature of the British in the Omani. These documents were created for internal usage, the audience being the departments involved, the politicians in cabinet, and the Foreign Office at large. These are also the limitations of the sources, as the documents themselves contain quite a bit of specific terminology and inferences that those within the departments would know rather than an external researcher. It's also important to state that the Foreign Office was the ultimate destination for most sources discussed, despite the sources being authored by differing offices like the Treasury Department, the Cabinet Office, the Power Department, and others. This left the Foreign Office in the role of Custodian of these documents, creating an issue of provenance for researchers looking at differing documents all under the heading of the Foreign office despite them being written with the input of multiple offices.

The limitations of the documents are also contextual, the larger context of the British empire is not fully discussed, instead they are left to these previously mentioned inferences, the Suez Crisis, issues with Mandatory Palestine, Yemen (Aden), and India are all passingly mentioned but the influences that these events have on the office in Oman is not truly reported nor explained. This narrows the scope of the documents significantly which both aids and hinders the research, allowing for greater investigation into Oman, but creating a greater amount of work for the researcher to create a more elaborate contextual framework. The ideological slant of the British government is also clear within these sources that deal

with the ORM and the Dhofar Liberation Front as they paint them as quasi-communist Arabist movements. This clearly paints the larger frame of the Cold War in their documents but not clearly, more inferences than statements. This lack of context and emphasis on bureaucratic knowledge is also likely why the documents and sources feature in a relatively minor way in other historical works on Oman. Not much in terms of military movements or numbers are apparent in them and instead the efforts go towards a more organisational almost managerial tone. As a result, this thesis examines these sources in detail, where others have overlooked them, establishing a new line of inquiry into the mechanisms of the Foreign Office's policymaking in Oman. The colonial archive itself is also a problematic entity. What is archived, what is kept, what is thrown, what is referenced correctly, all of these are distinct elements of policy. These documents are reflections of a web of ideology and prominence of the people who had both created and filed these documents, similar to the way Joyce refers to their significance in the context of the Raj in India and how its bureaucratic practices reflect the British colonial expression there.[8] In Oman, these networks were present but limited by context, as shall be shown throughout, and the overlapping administration between differing parts of British colonial territories throughout the Arabian Peninsula makes these networks have a broader remit, more power, and a more complicated hierarchy than in Joyce's studies.

[8] Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 146–149.

3. Historiography

The historiography of Oman is an oft-neglected subject by English speaking historians. While there are more general survey works by authors such as Jones and Ridout, there remains a dearth of literature on Oman with regards to the specificities of the country's more modern history.[9] With regards to specific events within Oman there is a small collection of specific titles dealing with the impact the Ibadhism (or Ibadism) have had on the political system of Oman as well as the impact of British policy on the splitting of the Sultanate between Muscat and Zanzibar. An important point to note of the sources between the British and Oman, one of the most significant pieces is written by a former British ambassador to the Omani Sultanate Donald Hawley, whose father was an important bureaucratic worker within the British Petroleum, Anglo-Persian and Anglo-Iranian oil Companies.[10]. Hawley's revelatory writings and descriptions are incredibly useful to the historian primarily due to the degree of familiarity and seniority he has with the area but also because it presents a clear and present link between the Omani political structure and the British establishment.

More recent scholarship on the Omani peoples is to be found in a few other historians of note. J. E. Peterson, Ian Skeet, John C. Wilkinson (who has more of a sociological focus), and Abdel Razzaq Takriti are some of the few historians who have done significant work on the period that this thesis will deal with in-depth.[11] Specifically focusing on the early to mid-twentieth century these historians are essential in understanding the Omani political background and historical context. Larger survey works, such as Allen Jr.'s work also provides important background information for the development of the Sultanate in macro terms, though its wide focus is an issue.[12] While these studies are very useful, they tend to overlook the more bureaucratic nuances of the British foreign office, or in Peterson's case, ignores them in lieu of military reports. This unaddressed aspect of the historiography is therefore addressed in this thesis, as the bureaucratic writings have a significant amount of important information. The writings of residents and consuls in the gulf area are quite numerous however, and albeit somewhat orientalising, they do elucidate the researcher as to the individual natures of the residents as well as their perspectives on specific developments

[9] Jeremy Jones, and Nicholas Ridout. *A History of Modern Oman,* (Cambridge, 2015).
[10] Hawley Papers, held at Durham University, Ref: HAW 51/11/14-19. Descriptions of the items available at <https://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wm117n97j.xml#qxj-4697>.
[11] See J.E. Peterson *Oman in the twentieth century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State.* (Routledge, 2016)*, Skeet, Ian. Oman: Politics and Development* (Springer, 1992). John C. Wilkinson, *Ibâḍism: Origins and Early Development in Oman* (Oxford 2010), Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965–1976* (Oxford, 2013). There are other such titles available from the former writers such as Peterson and Wilkinson. They will be dealt with in turn as the project continues.
[12] Allen Jr, Calvin H. *Oman: The Modernization of the Sultanate,* (London, 1987).

within the region. Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, Richard Muir's book on the residencies and missions of the British around the Gulf is a compulsory read for understanding the provenance of British presence in the Gulf.[13] This book is particularly useful for the provenance of differing officials and agents throughout the Gulf and is paramount in any discussion of the British Foreign Office in the region. Likewise, scholarship on the Trucial States has furthered the understanding of British foreign policy in the region, Muna Al-Hammadi, Tancred Bradshaw, and Fletcher all give great perspectives on the Gulf looking at both British administrators and the Tribal leaders who engaged in these talks, examining how the British dealt with traditional power structures in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.[14]

Oil in the Gulf region is a well discussed topic, broached by many authors in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.[15] Oil and Oman, however, is as previously stated, a much less investigated topic that has frustrated research goals to generalise about oil in the Arab World and Middle East more widely. Beginning with the simple fact that oil in Oman was not first discovered until the late 1960s, the focus has largely been on the exploration for oil and the possibility of an oil resource independent of Iran and Saudi Arabia that could be shipped into the Indian Ocean directly. The other oil producing nations were somewhat important to the British representatives in Oman, and the relationship between oil and diplomacy has been thoroughly investigated in the context of most oil producing nations, except Oman. Mandana Limbert is one of the only authors who has researched this element, albeit from a pointedly anthropological perspective. The way Limbert discusses these aspects are important though due to the ethnographic perspective it makes it difficult to use as a historical source.[16] The history of oil exploration Oman is limited, with scholarship tending to focus on the more popular histories of Saudi Arabia, Iran, the Gulf States, and South America. Similar historical works on Saudi Arabia and others are somewhat relevant to Oman as they do refer to the relationship between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.[17]

The economic history of Oman by extension, is also not often looked at. There are few secondary sources or monographs detailing the economy of Oman in any detail that

[13] Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, and Richard Muir, *British Missions Around the Gulf, 1575–2005* (Kent, 2008).
[14] Muna Al-Hammadi, *Britain and the Administration of the Trucial States: 1947-1965*. (Oxford, 2013), Tancred Bradshaw, *The end of empire in the Gulf: From trucial states to United Arab Emirates,* (Bloomsbury, 2020), and Robert Fletcher, *British imperialism, and the tribal question': desert administration and nomadic societies in the Middle East, 1919–1936*. (Oxford, 2015).
[15] J. E. Peterson, "The Arabian Peninsula in modern times: a historiographical survey of recent publications." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 244–274 (245).
[16] Mandana Limbert, "Liquid Oman: oil, water, and causality in Southern Arabia." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. S1 (2016): 147–162.
[17] Robert Vitalis, *America's kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi oil frontier* (New York, 2009).

would be considered enough. The previously cited J. E. Peterson is one of the few who have done in-depth research about Oman in the contemporary period, though his work is different due to his preference for military sources rather than diplomatic or bureaucratic. He has published political histories and monographs on the Sultanate, it's struggles to create a state in the interior of Oman, and the political legitimacy the Omani Government has claimed since the Dhofari Rebellion.[18] His works deal with the military personages and military issues that influenced the political reality in a military context but not in an economic one. This is due primarily to the fact that oil itself was not a driving element in Omani politics for the British until the mid-1960s, this was prelude to the days of oil. Instead, it was (as previously mentioned) the *possibility* that oil would be present in enough quantities that would lead the British foreign, energy, and war offices to take the actions that they would eventually set on. The situation in Oman, politically and historically as a result is quite complex, and rarely stationary one decade to the next.

In terms of British historical terms, especially in terms of the British colonial context, there are little in terms of Omani focus. They instead deal with the British empire in the Middle East in general, or in specific in Mandatory Palestine, Iraq, or Jordan. Arab Nationalism, imperialism in the postwar time, and the 'East of Suez' elements are all of importance with regards to Oman. Even tracts on these important topics often overlook Oman in their works, instead they focus on the UAE and other more explicit British colonial outlets in the Middle East.[19] British policy and collusion with apparatuses extant within the Middle East is also investigated within the corpus of Bradshaw's work. His work greatly improves the understanding of British imperial policy within the Middle East, especially regarding the British diplomatic relations with Jordan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia in the first half of the twentieth century.[20] All of these works and authors add to the understanding of British imperial policy. None of them however, deal with the British in Oman in as much detail as this thesis. An investigation into the British imperial project in Oman in its minutiae has yet to be done, especially in the context of oil companies. This is the gap in the research hoping to be filled, through minute research in the sources available in Kew.

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[18] J. E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London, 2016).
[19] See Simon C. Smith, "Failure and Success in State Formation: British Policy Towards the Federation of South Arabia and the United Arab Emirates." *Middle Eastern Studies* 53, no. 1 (2017): 84–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2016.1196667>. For more on the British imperial policy in the UAE. See also Tancred Bradshaw, *The Glubb Reports: Glubb Pasha and Britain's Empire Project in the Middle East 1920–1956* (London, 2016).
[20] Tancred Bradshaw, "Arms and Influence: British arms policy and the decline of British influence in the Middle East, 1948-49." *British Scholar* 3, no. 1 (2010): 79–104.

Historical studies on Oman in general have lacked a few key elements however, with focus being on a wider chronological view of Omani events, or a microhistory into the insurgencies of the 1950s and 1960s. The relationship between public, private, and the Omani political apparatus. These have been eschewed in favour of more grounded and specific histories such as that of the Jebel Akhdar war, and little analysis has been done into the role the Foreign Offices policymaking played in the wider British colonial context for Oman. This project aims to fill the niche examining the bureaucratic sources in minutiae rather than military histories, and to highlight an often-forgotten part of the British imperial project. One that was significant in it's aims, valuable in its location, and experientially significant for those who worked on it. The examination of how the British created and maintained the bureaucratic–political–corporate nexus is the main concern for this project, an element not often considered in other such studies.

4. The British Context: British Interest and Influence in Oman

There are many dimensions to consider with regards to the case of Oman under quasi-British rule, and though oil would go to develop its importance in the early twentieth century, in the late nineteenth century, coaling stations and rights to mine coal and other strategic resources, were of the utmost importance for the British. This drive for concessionary agreements would define much of the late nineteenth century relationship between Britain and the Sultan. This became such an important part of the British presence "east of Suez" that the relationship would continue until 1972 when the Omani navy began to arm independently of Britain rendering British aid redundant.[21] The earliest mentions of the people within the British Foreign Office seeking to gain a treaty benefitting a mineral company mentions coaling mines explicitly, particularly to counter the French expanse into the Indian Ocean Region.[22] That being said, the price of oil and the impact of oil as a determining factor within the development of Oman's political landscape, it's foreign relations, and its own standard of living are truly at the heart of the discussion here.

To understand that conversation, a background of the period and the major events are needed, discussing the earliest impact, influence, and extent of the development of the oil industry in Oman under the British. In examining this specific part of Omani economic history, we can begin to understand how oil companies in Oman, especially Anglo–Dutch Shell and the Anglo–Iranian oil company, leveraged their political influence in Westminster to pressure Oman for concessions to their benefit. European interest in the natural resources of Oman mirrors European and American interest in Saudi Arabian oil fields and resources. Concessionary agreements were not only consideration for the British in Oman. They also had to deal with certain economic factors from the perspective of the Anglo-Persian oil Company, specifically the granting of monopoly rights to specific people rather than companies under the Anglo-Persian oil Company moniker.[23]

Writings on these topics are in-depth and allow for a significant amount of research. The lack of more differing viewpoints on the subject and the frustrating nature of survey texts on the Middle East in general allow for a much deeper analysis of Oman in isolation. The

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[21] Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, and Richard Muir, *British Missions Around the Gulf, 1575–2005* (Kent, 2008) p. 235.

[22] M. Reda. Bhacker, *Trade and Empire in Muscat and Zanzibar: The Roots of British Domination* (Routledge, 2002) p. 156–157.

[23]Telegram from Trevor Bushire to the Political agent of Muscat on the issue of Anglo–Persian oil Company obtaining a license for prospecting in Oman, dated 9th September,1921, collected in "File XVIII/4 coal, mining rights and monopolies Anglo- Persian oil Company, 1921 to 1928", p. 3, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/24, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x000250> [accessed 7 June 2023]

country has largely been ignored in the greater hydrocarbon histories of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of whom have a had a considerable weight on political movements in the region.

In broader terms, the events that would play pivotal roles in the development of British Policy in Oman would be the Buraimi Crisis (1952–1955), which would typify Arabian state intrigue between Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the Trucial States, the Jebel Akhdar war (October 1954 – January 1959), and the Dhofari Rebellion (June 1963 – March 1976). These events would mark an evolving policy of intervention, non-intervention, mercenaryism, and quasi-colonialism in the British administration. Said bin Taimur's reign ended with his deposition in 1970 and his son, Qaboos bin Said took over and immediately began much more extensive modernisation efforts. These events from a military history perspective have been dealt with in much more detail by the J. E. Peterson, Jones and Ridout, as well as others. What interests this project is the expression of British colonialism through the creation of a bureaucratic-political-corporate nexus. The main expressions being through favourable deals for both British bureaucracy and oil companies, specifically in deals around the exploration and exploitation of possible oil supplies.

5. The Omani Context: Muscat and Oman; Sultan and Imam

The history of Muscat and Oman is not a single history. It is important to realise that 'Oman' as it exists today was not always a unified state. Instead, the Sultanate (largely limited to Muscat and its surroundings) and the Imamate (encompassing much of the interior, north-west, and south) held opposing claims to the sovereignty of the state. Their relationship was not openly antagonistic, though state expression of either was usually isolated to Walis on the hand of the Sultan, and Imams on the hand of the Imamate. This began to change after British influence expanded in the region in the nineteenth century. Proto-globalisation due to the growing influence of maritime empires like the British played a significant part in Oman's fortunes.[24] The British contact with Oman began in the nineteenth century and extends far into the middle of the twentieth century, with their specific influence being felt more in the nature of more traditional colonial competition with the French for dominance in the area.

While there are sources pertaining to a contact prior to the nineteenth century, these focus on the influence not of the British state but the importance of the area to the East India Company, especially in the context of a developing power base in Mumbai (then Bombay).[25] British Imperial developments in this early state are best quoted from the Sultan reigning in 1800, Sayyid Sultan bin-Ahmad "an English gentleman of respectability should always reside at the port of Muscat."[26] Oman and its dependencies as a somewhat decentralised state were grouped together with the Trucial States with the British effectively controlling their foreign policy. In terms of the beginning of the relationship, one of the most important developments that set the stage for *de facto* British Colonisation was the cession of the *Khuriya Muriiya* Islands to the British Government in 1854.[27]

The most significant event in nineteenth century Omani development culminated with the Canning Award of 1861 when the British, in recognising the Sultan of Zanzibar as a separate head of state, effectively partitioned what was up until that point the Omani and Zanzibari Sultanate.[28] This imposition by the British would foment a style of rebellion that would come to a head in 1920, many decades later in an Imamate revival and rebellion.[29] The

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[24] Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout, *A history of Modern Oman* (Oxford, 2015), p. 63.
[25] Reda Bhacker, *Trade and empire in Muscat and Zanzibar,* p. 125–127.
[26] Ian Skeet, *Muscat, and Oman: the end of an era*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p. 213.
[27] "A Collection of Treaties and Engagements relating to the Persian Gulf Shaikhdoms and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman in force up to the End of 1953" [26v] pp. 54–55, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/738, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023550810.0x000037> [accessed 22 April 2022]
[28] Arbuthnott, Clark, and Muir, *British Missions Around the Gulf, 1575–2005* (Kent, 2008), p. 229.
[29] File 4684/1913 "Pt 1 Muscat rebellion" [1r] pp. 10–12, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/425, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100037233961.0x00000b> [accessed 11 May 2023]

movement at that particular time, however modern it might have been deemed in retrospect, was considered an Imamate revolution trading the more regional and Iranian style-Twelver Shia Islam (which the majority of Oman practiced at the time) for the relatively more secretive Ibadi Islam.[30] This split defined the politics of Oman for the majority of its history. From the 7th to the Nineteenth centuries, the Politics of Oman was put as a differing grouping compared to the rest of the Arabian Peninsula – and the Islamic world at large also. While this history is extremely fascinating, it falls outside of the scope of this study. The solidity of Ibadi Islam and its isolation to Muscat, define one extremely important element of the conflict between Oman's Sultanate and its Imamate.

Ibadi Islam is a very minor sect of Islam, almost entirely predominant and demographically locked to the country of Oman, especially in the interior. Ibadi Islam is also somewhat reflected in the peoples of Tanzania, Libya and on the island of Djerba in Tunisia, but is predominantly in Oman. The rise and development of Ibadi Islam is important to contextualise as it is a predominant feature of the political system of Oman and plays a huge role in the consolidation of the Sultan's power over the interior of the country also. Ibadi Islam, the Sultanate, and the political reality of Oman with these two in context is extremely important for understanding why colonial intent from both authorities in Muscat, as well as British Authorities in Bushehr must be extrapolated. With regards to their relative influence on the interior which was to a certain extent was self-governed and loosely connected, these differing power groups are what would form the blocs that define Omani politics.[31]

The interior, the southern hills, and the tribal lands surrounding Muscat were largely ungoverned by a central authority until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Sultanate of Muscat decided to extend its influence over the entirety of what is now considered to be Oman. Prior to this, the interior was governed by an Imamate, an authority of loosely affiliated tribal structures and elders that would gather at certain points and choose their leader. This Imamate was a system of elective theocracy and autocracy that would elect a temporal and spiritual ruler through a suffrage of tribal elders and *Walis*. The philosophy of this governance was simple in nature. The Imam was not an absolute ruler but instead delegated his authority to the various *Walis* (governors) to rule on his behalf and to keep the tenets of his rule at the core.[32] This led to a highly decentralised system of governance that would largely remain in the interior of Oman until the 1950s. The Imamate tradition has been

[30] Ian Skeet, *Oman: Politics and Development* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 33.
[31] John C. Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman,* pp. 22–24.
[32] J. E. Peterson, "The Revival of the Ibadi Imamate in Oman and the Threat to Muscat, 1913-20." in *Arabian Studies III*. London: C. Hurst & Co (1976).

described as 'democratic' by some historians, though the lack of free suffrage of all throws this distinction into question.[33] Regardless, the tradition is very clearly less authoritarian than the predominant political systems of similar Gulf states today or in the time that this form of governance was dominant in Oman.

In effect what this led to was a somewhat solidification of the Tribal Society of Oman, with the tribal elders of specific parts of the country being the vehicles for political expression as opposed to the Sultanates absolute authority.[34] The historian Hussein Ghubash referred to this somewhat confraternal order of political assemblage as being "the first of its democratic kind" and "ensured the continuity of the *imama*" – the confraternal group that would select the Imam. Ibadi Islam in this context was increasingly concerned with the creation of an ideal Islamic State, one that would live in harmony with *sharia* and the will of the Prophet.[35] The Imamate's 'capital' of Nizwa is an important geographical location, due primarily to the road leading from Muscat into the interior of the country. Nizwa (sometimes referred to as Nazwa) played an important role throughout Oman's history and was largely one of the main seats of the Imamate, and oft referred to as the religious and cultural capital of Oman. Whereas Muscat was largely the economic centre and political capital of the Sultanates exterior slice of Oman, Nizwa was considered centre for the Imamate and by extension the interior. The significance of the separation of capitals politically within one state was clearly not lost on the British authorities, who remarked upon the need to back a central authority in Oman. In a political memorandum addressed to the residency in Bushire, R.E.L. Wingate describes the political situation that the Sultanate is facing after the Imamate revolt in 1920:

> It is a fact, however, that from the death of Sultan Sayyid bin Said that the power of the Sultan over the interior has become more nominal than ever. Attacks by tribes within the interior have become more frequent, bribery and extortion have become the norm and successive tribes have attempted to set up Imams of their own … the success of Faisal has only been saved by our support.[36]

Wingate expounds on a philosophy seen in much of the British dealings with the Gulf region. That of a preference for a strong, unitary, authority figure that would aid to demarcate

[33] Hussein Ghubash, *Oman- The Islamic Democratic Tradition* (Routledge, 2014), pp. 7–8.
[34]Ibid., p. 9.
[35] Ibid., pp. 10, 14–15.
[36] "File 8/67 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT–OMAN TREATY." [6v] (17/316), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/264, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100070535087.0x000012> [accessed 13 October 2022]

boundaries, allow for significantly more efficient diplomatic proceedings, and allow for the ease of introducing British influence into the region. Relatively speaking, the Oman of the early twentieth century, as Wingate is commenting on here, was a reflection and continuation of the Oman of the earlier centuries, a place very much divided; geographically, politically, and religiously. Nizwa (the capital of the Imamate), was a different centre to Muscat, and this remained the reality until the beginning of the 1950s. This separation between Muscat and the interior is reflected in almost every facet of Omani history: the conquest of Zanzibar, the subsequent rise of the Omani Slave trade, the Canning Award, and the rise of the Dhofar Liberation Front. In each of these events this situational, philosophical, and religious differences of the Omani interior and the Sultanate in Muscat made themselves palpably felt, primarily one of keeping the Sultanate state at arm's length.[37] This is a natural extension of the culture that the Imamate system fostered in the interior which allowed tribes to self-govern and acceded to authority when it benefitted them. The Sultanate however, as an absolutist state, could not allow this form of governance to go unanswered within the interior. This was especially so as the British recognised it as the proper and legitimate government of *all* Oman.[38] It is this situation of somewhat relative friction between the interior of Oman and the Muscat Sultanate that forms the backdrop over the conflict over oil in the twentieth century. Similarly, to most of the surrounding Arab states, this conflict has large roots in the past spreading back as far as the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate but was further complicated by the intervention of the British.

As a result of this political movement's success in the Sultanate, the British feared a more radical element not allied to them taking over a key consideration for colonial prospects in the Gulf region. This was exemplified by the early Wahhabi movement in the Gulf Region that would come to dominate much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century political movements against British domination in Arab lands. This was complicated by French involvement in the wider context of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Oman was a key competitive area for the French in their search for dominance over the British, and there was fear these radical movements would ally with the French.[39] This fear was unfounded however, as the British and French contest over Muscat was a relatively short affair. This would culminate with the Sultanate trying to agitate the British into better terms for their

[37] Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, p. 47.
[38] J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London, 2008), pp. 40 – 42.
[39] Guillemette Crouzet, "A Second Fashoda? Britain, India, and a French "Treat" in Oman at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in James R. Fichter, (ed.) *British and French colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East: Connected Empires Across the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Springer, 2019), p. 135–137.

concessions by allowing the French to create a coaling station in the Bandar Jissah region south of Muscat. The climax of this issue was forced by the British in the end with them threatening to bombard the Sultan's palace and a hasty compromise with the French over their dominant position in Oman.[40] Be it the colonial conception and the reality of their situation not being made clear to the British authorities, the reality is that the Ibadi and Wahhabist movements were counter to each other and when the British realised this they were quick to make allies. [41]

The interior of Oman was similarly ruled by Ibadi Imams while the Sultan had control over the coastal parts of the Omani country, with the main difference being that, up until the mid-nineteenth century the Sultanate had essentially been under the thumb of a foreign power, be it the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and then the British in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.[42] It is important at this stage to explain Ibadi Islam in the characteristics of what is referred to as the *Nahda* or the Islamic enlightenment. A fundamental point to understand is the relationship between Islam and political sovereignty. This a time when the Islamic intelligentsia of most Arabic countries were beginning to be influenced by European ideas of nationalism, secularism (to a lesser degree), and democracy. This late nineteenth century political and religious movement had a direct influence on the development of the political landscape of Oman, especially the Imamate.[43] All of this to the degree that the Sultan of Oman funded the development of a printing and literary culture in Zanzibar, which had become the focal point of Intelligentsia of the Omani Sultanate.[44]

This movement had a transformative effect on the political culture within Oman and by extension influenced the Sultanate's relationship with the British. The Ibadi movement in Oman, like any religiously influenced political movement, is extremely nuanced and varied in character but rested on a principle of right governance, theological consideration, and strength in governance. Where implications for the British relationship begin, however, is with the mischaracterisation of the Ibadi movement as being like the extremist Islamic rhetoric of the Wahabbist movements of the Saudis. The British saw only the restriction of specific customs that the Ibadi considered *haram* as counter to the Free Trade narrative

[40] Arbuthnott, Clark, and Muir, *British Missions Around the Gulf,* p. 234.
[41] See Jonathan Parry, *Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East* (Princeton, 2022) for more information.
[42] Brandon Friedman, *The End of Pax Britannica in the Persian Gulf 1968-1971* (London, 2020), p. 25–27.
[43] Valeri, Marc. *Oman. Politics and society in the Qaboos state* (London, 2009), p. 26–27.
[44] Amal Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s–1930s)*, (London, 2010) p. 20

preferable to the empire and specifically customs-free market that they wanted to engender in previous rulers of the Sultanate of Oman.[45]

Contextually speaking, the beginning of the twentieth century and the context of post-First World War British hegemony in the Gulf put Oman in a bind. They were dependent on the British for nearly everything. Security, diplomacy, and economy were all well within the remit of the British establishment within Muscat and it is this context that the reign of Said bin Taimur begins.

[45] Jones and Ridout, *A history of Modern Oman*, p. 63

Chapter 2: "Nominally Independent – in reality under British Protection" – The 1930s, 1940s, and the Special Relationship between Muscat and London

1. The Beginning of British Representation

The Sultan, Said bin Taimur, born in 1918, was officially crowned Sultan of Muscat and Oman on July 10th 1932, replacing his father Taimur bin Faysal. He was a complicated man, having been brought up partially in Oman and partially in India. He attended school in Mayo College in Ajmer in India, and further education took place in Baghdad.[1] This chapter will focus on the relationship between the British and the Sultanate in the first decades of Said's rule. His ascension was an issue for British representatives in the 1930s, whose relationship with the Sultanate was in flux amid the Great Depression. The relationship between Oman and the British was mediated through the government of India, who in the 1920s and 1930s were the closest neighbours to the then Omani possession of Gwadar, a port on the southern part of what would become Pakistan.[2] British India would therefore be one of the foremost and closest allies of the Omani possession and by extension, the Sultanate itself. The Sultan Taimur, however, was famously indolent and was more interested in leading a metropolitan lifestyle in different parts of the world than ruling.[3] In 1931 however, the British were informed by the Sultan himself that he would be abdicating, and this threw a series of measures the India Office had negotiated with the Sultanate into question. The Political Resident of the Persian Gulf as it was known in the 1930s, was Lt. Colonel H.V. Biscoe. Biscoe reports on his arguments to the Sultan attempting to get him to change his mind on abdicating:

> I regret to inform the government of India that all my efforts to induce His highness to return to Muscat and the reconsider his decision were un-availing, and that he absolutely refused to do so.[4]

The India Office was, for all intents and purposes, the Foreign Office of this geographic region. Though the hierarchy would largely remain intact, the name would change

[1] "Abdication of Sultan Said bin Faisal and accession of Sultan Saiyid Said ibn Said", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/446, p. 27, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001a3> [accessed 9 May 2023] (The largeness of these documents is particularly useful for the purposes of this research as QDL has put together all relevant correspondence and archival data in one area topically).

[2] Azhar Ahmad "Gwadar: A Historical Kaleidoscope." *Policy Perspectives* 13, no. 2 (2016): 149–66. https://doi.org/10.13169/polipers.13.2.0149.

[3] J. E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London, 1978), pp. 49–51.

[4] "Abdication of Sultan Said bin Faisal and accession of Sultan Saiyid Said ibn Said", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/446, pp. 22-26 (24), in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001a3> [accessed 9 May 2023]

after the Second World War, reflecting the loss of British India. The relationship between the Sultan and the British is reflected in documents of this office and in the early 1930s much of that relationship was based on proximity through Gwadar and using Oman as a quasi-military standpoint for the British Army. Here is the beginning of the understanding of the British on the Political landscape of Oman. This is evident in the documentations, where Biscoe talks of the separation between Imamate and Sultanate; of Interior and Coast.[5] The opinion of the resident in these documents staggeringly clashes with later opinions of Said in the 1970s. Biscoe remarks on his 'quick temper' and 'ability to assert his authority', two things the British diplomatic corps in Oman would come to consider their main obstacle in getting Oman to cooperate with their policies. Few other studies looked at the resident in this context, and the resident's relationship with the Sultan here is important to consider. This document also shows the beginning of the controls of the finances of state that the British would come to have almost total control over during the life of Said. Biscoe states "[i]t will however be necessary to maintain some measure of control over the finances of the State… he is young and has no competent advisers."[6] During the 1930s the British maintained a subsidy by which they paid 100,00rs for arms from Oman, and an extra 2,000 for the person of the Sultan nominally for using the port of Gwadar but largely as a personal finance to the Sultan.[7] The importance of this is not delved within the documents and the British are at pains to relate that this subsidy, however significant it is, will no longer be relevant with the ascension of Said.

Probably the most significant precursor policy element to Said's reign that exemplified the relationship between the Foreign Office and Oman was the Treaty of Seeb, signed in 1920. This treaty guaranteed a level of peaceful decorum between the Imamate and the Sultanate and was negotiated with the aid of Ronald Wingate, consul at Muscat for the British. Wingate comments on how "[t]he territory of the Sultan was on its last legs … he is only here with all our support."[8] This was the position that Said would find himself in for

[5] "Abdication of Sultan Said bin Faisal and accession of Sultan Saiyid Said ibn Said", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/446, pp. 11–13, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001a3> [accessed 9 May 2023]
[6] "Abdication of Sultan Said bin Faisal and accession of Sultan Saiyid Said ibn Said", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/446, pp. 27–28, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001a3> [accessed 9 May 2023]
[7] "Abdication of Sultan Said bin Faisal and accession of Sultan Saiyid Said ibn Said", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/446, pp. 1–4, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000193.0x0001a3> [accessed 9 May 2023]
[8] Historical Background on the negotiations of the Treaty of Seeb and its relevance for the Rule of Said bin Taimur, "File 8/67 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT – OMAN TREATY." [23r] (50/316), British

most of his reign, encapsulated in a treaty with the Imamate brokered by the British. Dependant on the British for support, not recognised by the interior unless the Sultanate conquers it by force. For much of the interwar period there is no impetus for the British to intervene on behalf of the Sultan and attempt to pacify his enemies. The most relevant development in this era with regards to oil is the beginning of the concessionary negotiations for the Omani interior and coast. The British had begun working on acquiring a concession under Said's father. There was little hope from the Anglo-Persian oil company, however. Their representative had discussed it with the British resident and had pulled out due to there "being no oil in Oman … we have given up the concession."[9] D'Arcy Exploration had been granted a two-year lease in their absence to "search for natural gas, petroleum, asphalte, and ozokerite" under this lease.[10] The political resident at the time, C.A. Crosthwaite, was based in Bushehr, and while the consuls were instrumental in the ratification of agreements like the Treaty of Seeb, little crises plagued the Sultanate. The Foreign Office in Britain were more interested in the ongoing crisis of Foreign Policy in the dominions, and the issues of state in India rather than in other areas, and this lack of attention is felt in the documents.

These leases, and their ratification is by far the most significant of starting developments in this nexus of British–Omani–Corporate relations that would come to define this late imperial period in Oman. The Foreign Office was in a tumultuous time and as such much of their actions are more questionable, leading to a lack of policymaking clarity. However, these indicative pieces, like the leasing agreements and negotiations give a good idea of what the British were willing to settle over and what they fought for.

Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/264, pp. 54–55. in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100070535087.0x000033> [accessed 10 May 2023]

[9] Concessionary agreement of the D'Arcy exploration company with the government of the Sultan of Oman and Muscat, dated May 18th, 1925., File 2794/1921 Pt 5A "PERSIAN GULF OIL MUSCAT", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/994/2, in *Qatar Digital Library* pp. 540–541. <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100077134746.0x000001> [accessed 10 May 2023]

[10] Ibid., p. 542.

2. The Interwar Years in Micro

The interwar years were a quieter time for Oman. The early years, however, still show the willingness of the British to fully leverage their presence in India on Asian and Middle Eastern countries. This section will examine the development of the relationship during the interwar years. The British were tied up in interventions throughout the area, in Mandatory Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. Encapsulated by British historian Elizabeth Monroe as "Britain's Moment in the Middle East", these interventions would be a legacy on British colonialism and prestige in the area.[11] Oman was no different but the extent that the British were involved was minimal until after the Second World War. The Sultanate was bundled together with the rest of the Trucial Coast; left to its own devices after the negotiation of the Treaty of Seeb unless called upon. Much of the documentation points to a growing malaise in the diplomatic corps over involvement in the Middle East prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Concessionary deliberations for Oman were held in concert with other countries and their respective political rulers. The greatest issue at this stage, which would remain an issue for the British, would be the delineation of borders and the territoriality of states.[12]

The effective protectorate status of these territories gave the British a significant amount of latitude to work on behalf of the oil companies and press gulf countries to assure the companies of freedom to work within specific areas. Territoriality in Muscat was an issue for the British as the Resident at Aden and Dhofari offices of the Political Resident of the Gulf had some issue in overlap. A communiqué to the Sultan sought to fix this issue, placing the southernmost point of Oman to the Qara tribe. This tribe had largely been concentrated in Southern Yemen, and the British decided to make the distinction towards Oman more significantly marking the boundary of Oman and Yemen at Ras Dharbat Ali (modern day Sarfayt), which remains the border point.[13] This delineation of borders in Oman was a crucial issue for the oil companies also. The primacy of British influence in an area almost always led to oil companies benefitting from this placement of the border. Allowing for a more robust infrastructure through British Military attachés or at the very least that which was

[11]Robert Fletcher, *British Imperialism and 'The Tribal Question': Desert Administration and Nomadic Societies in the Middle East, 1919-1936*. (Oxford, 2015), pp. 3–5. For the book in question see Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East* (London, 1963).

[12] Comments on where to put neutral zones between the different sheikdoms and their negotiations with oil companies on the matter, dated May 3rd 1933, "File 38/15 oil concessions in Arabia and the Gulf (Muscat)" [12r] (23/224), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/2/870, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100025657240.0x000018> [accessed 10 May 2023]

[13] Claim of His Highness the Sultan of Muscat over the Qara tribe who inhabit Kharifat, dated June 24th, 1932, FO 1016/495, p. 35.

lobbied for by the British diplomatic corps.[14] Oman also fell to this strong British diplomatic front in the early part of the twentieth century. A spate of negotiations in 1923, 1928, and 1934 made Oman a special protected state with more significant concessions than other parts of the Trucial Coast. It also gave Britain control over Oman's newly built airfields a critical part of military infrastructure in the early twentieth century.[15] From the perspective of past military historians, this was one of the main lynchpins of the British effort in Oman. What is failed to be considered however, is the significance of the maintenance of the airfields by the armed forces. The wider implication of the institutionalisation of British presence in the Sultanate of being operative, the Sultanate would come to be considered somewhat of a training placement or experience earning placement for officers and army sergeants, thus entrenching their position.

Foreign Office policy was to keep and protect these privileges with a firm grip, despite opposition from the Sultan. The situation of Oman geopolitically speaking, did not allow the Sultan to leverage any position against the British. The nature of the personal rule of the Sultan within Oman would frequently be both an issue and benefit for the British, who were at cross-purposes with the Sultan at many points. They only saw eye to eye on several issues, particularly his primacy over all of Oman, not just the coast. A position preferable to the British who had invested significant energy and money into the Sultanate since the 1890s and saw the Imamate at this time as a semi-communist affiliated entity.[16] The 1930s would see the advent of the largest struggle between Sultan and the British, however, as negotiations over concessionary agreements concerning oil would begin in earnest. In 1937, the IPC was granted a seventy-five-year lease to explore the interior and set up the Petroleum Development Oman & Dhofar (modern-day Petroleum Development (Oman)).[17] This concessionary arrangement was enabled and negotiated by the political resident of the time, Major Ralph Watts, who was representative in Oman from 1936-1940.[18]

[14] Calvin H. Allen Jr., *Oman: The Modernisation of the Sultanate* (London, 2016), pp. 147–149.
[15] Ibid., p. 150
[16] Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires, 1965–1976* (Oxford, 2013), p. 20.
[17] "File 14/1- Vol 6 OIL CONCESSIONS MUSCAT" [34r] pp. 63–65, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/428, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100056086280.0x000044> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[18] Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, and Richard Muir. *British Missions Around the Gulf, 1575-2005: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman*. (Leiden, 2008), p. 255.

It details the acquisition of a lease for seventy-five years of all areas excluding Gwadar and Dhofar.[19] The larger commentary by the Consul and Resident on the concessions describes the "keen interest of the Sultan on this area" yet his "lack of control over the peoples within."[20] The Sultanate's issues with control in its areas is clarified, as the British required the representative of the Sultan to get into the interior for geological expeditions. The interior was clearly an issue even at this early point in the late 1930s, as the Sultan had to negotiate with the sheikhs of the interior, close to Buraimi a problematic area for access. The British resident explains as much in letters to the Foreign Office, stating:

> As regards [Buraimi], the Sultan, without specific reference to the Imama or to Sheikh Isa, practically admitted that there were at present such difficulties as would preclude exploration under his own auspices.[21]

Clearly there was still a level of tension between the Sultanate and Imamate that would disable the British from operating effectively without risk. The issue of the limits of the Sultans authority is one that is palpably documented contemporaneously. The Sultan had come into power with little control in the interior, Dhofar was still his summer capital but isolated relative to the rest of the Sultanate, and on the eve of the Second World War. Thus, his need to solidify his rule was at the forefront of his actions. The Sultan would exercise what power he had against the British, however, arguing that the concessionary agreement was underhanded, and attempting to foist conditions upon him that were not desirable.[22] The Sultan expresses that in "recognition with the old firm relationship that we have had with the British government" he had engaged the resident to "find a British company to do the oil exploration" within Oman proper and in his territories. The wording of the concessionary agreement he argued was in bad faith. Regardless however, as is indicative of this period for Oman, the British ended up getting what they wanted in the negotiations.

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[19] Oil agreement between the British Government, the Sultanate of Oman, and Petroleum Development (Oman and Dhofar), dated June 24th, 1937, "Sultanate of Muscat and Oman [oil concession agreement]", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/18/B465, in *Qatar Digital Library* p. 4. <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000833.0x00001b> [accessed 11 May 2023]

[20] File 14/1- Vol 6 OIL CONCESSIONS MUSCAT' [34r] pp. 63–65, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/428, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100056086280.0x000044> [accessed 11 May 2023]

[21] Letter from Petroleum Development (Oman and Dhofar) employee St. John [illegible] concerning the issue of Buraimi and the hinterland of the Arabian Peninsula, dated February 21st, 1938, "File 14/1 III oil concession in Muscat" p. 214, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/425, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100057248891.0x000077> [accessed 11 May 2023]

[22] Letter from the Sultan to the Political Resident of the Persian Gulf, dated April 6th 1938, "File 14/1 III oil concession in Muscat" [257r] p. 242-245, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/425, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100057248891.0x000077> [accessed 11 May 2023]

The Foreign Office was at pains at these stages to oversee the development of the Omani negotiations through a lens of enabling development. Enabling the oil companies to get to an oil rich country independent of alliances in Arabia, Europe, or Africa, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War would have been a huge boon to the British government. The Trucial States and Oman, as well as Saudi Arabia had very undefined territorial boundaries, and the British were keen to leverage this and benefit their protectorates in the gulf as much as possible. A communiqué the year prior to the signing of the concession in Muscat explains as much expressing how:

> All the area in the desert beyond the line we have offered to Ibn Saud is 'res nullius' to which our Arab clients have as much right (if not more) to raise a claim to as Ibn Saud himself.[23]

The Foreign Office talked constantly of how the importance of oil in the desert will lead to significant issues of territoriality in the Rub' al Khali, leading to the raising of many different claims between different tribes allied to different states (such as what would happen in Buraimi). This was an issue that had plagued British administration in the Arabian Peninsula from the beginning. It is clear from the dealings with the Sultan, Ibn Saud, and the Sheikhs of the Trucial States, that British legitimacy as proxy for oil companies were preferable with rulers unilaterally held power a total region rather than tribal councils or groups. Their power in the desert in general, was heavily dependant on the national contexts of the countries within, and this required a national context, not a tribal one.[24] The modus operandi for the British in a situation like this had been well established in Oman already, that the Sultan was to be supported as sole legitimate authority to the entirety of Oman. The Treaty of Seeb had already put the Sultan as Sovereign over Oman but granted limited rights and freedoms to the Imamate.[25] This context wouldn't change until the late 1945, when the Sultan expressed desire to control the interior. In early negotiations between the Foreign Office and the Sultanate, however, delineating the borders of the Sultanate had to consider the (somewhat liquid) borders of the Trucial States, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. This would be done so there would be no overlap in colonial administration, especially in Aden, which was a powerful British enclave. Saudi's consideration here was more over a need for the British to separate their claims from the nascent kingdom and its relationship with the Americans.

[23] Communiqué from E.A Seal, to India office Representative G.W. Rendel, dated December 7th 1936, "File 38/15 oil concessions in Arabia and the Gulf (Muscat)" [23r] p. 51, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/2/870, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100025657240.0x00002e> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[24] Fletcher, *British Imperialism & 'The Tribal Question'*, pp. 137–139.
[25] Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century,* p. 32.

Regardless of cause, British interest in the region right now was indemnified by the Sultanate's almost total dependence on the Crown.

As the 1930s waned, the British involvement in Oman became a custodial role, as the situation with Germany deteriorated and the outbreak of the Second World War loomed ever closer. Documents show that even during the Second World War, the British were fully in control of the Omani treasury and held a significant amount of power over the finances of the Sultanate. The state budget of Oman, for 1938 was 6,52,000 rupees, according to the British financial advisor that the Sultanate employed.[26] Not only was the Director of Finances, British but so was the customs overseer, the Director of Revenue, and at least two accountants underneath these officials within the department.[27] This state of affairs within the Muscat treasury is attested to in this document series as it describes the placement of British financial staff within the Sultanate for the entirety of the war, all in "the absence of the Sultan." The Sultan at this stage was in Salalah, in Dhofar, a retreat at many points during his reign where he would fundamentally exit day-to-day governance and leave it to his advisors. The delegation of financial duties was seen from the beginning of Said's reign, with the earliest documentation holding British primacy in financial matters dated May 1934.[28] This shows that extensive financial support that the British government subsidised Oman for the entirety of the reign of Said bin Taimur, and the implication during these wars has little to do with oil. The administration itself was also beholden to the ideology and philosophy of the British and was subject to their whims which at this time was ignoring the state in favour of a degrading European political situation.

The significance of the creation, support, and solidification of a state that is inherently Anglo-centred and would act as an outpost for the British empire to control in times of crisis in the Gulf cannot be understated. A friendly nation in the Persian Gulf that was at a key juncture for the oil trade, opened to the Arabian Peninsula, and competed with the American-supported encroachment of Saudi Arabia were all clearly of paramount importance to the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office's actions during this time, however, are limited as concessionary arrangements had halted for the Second World War. The prevailing thought

[26] Detailed state budget for Oman presented to the Political Resident of the Persian gulf, dated January 26th 1939 "File 8/14 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT STATE FINANCES & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS." pp. 10-17, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/196, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x00038b> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[27] Ibid., pp. 18-21
[28] Letter concerning financial matters of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, dated May 30th, 1934, "File 8/14 I MUSCAT FINANCE, REVENUE, TAXES. BUDGETS." British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/195, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x00038a> [accessed 11 May 2023]

being that when hostilities with Germany ceased, there would be a negligible renegotiation for five years after that cessation.[29] Largely though, the budget in Muscat seemed satisfactory to the British, a situation that would continue to the beginning of 1946. An interesting point to note however, is the British seeing the Sultan in his palace in Salalah, in Dhofar, as an escape from them. R. Daubeny, Secretary to the Political Resident in Bushire, states in a letter to the Foreign Office that:

> The Sultan looks upon Dhofar as his private estate … reasons being freedom from local intrigue, better living conditions, and freedom from restraint in lining his own pocket … how much longer public opinion will permit him to enjoy his privileges remains to be seen.[30]

This situation, with the British left to run the Sultanate in the absence of the Sultan, was the case with the father of Said as well, and a problem the British would come up against time and time again with the Sultan. Why the Sultan would go down to Salalah remains unexplained but given the distance and reasons the British give, the Sultan would enjoy his palace extensively throughout his reign. The Foreign Office and the consular staff in Muscat were, nevertheless, adamant that this situation be remedied as soon as the war would permit. One of these reasons being the discounting of the subsidies from the concessionary agreements not being reported on within the annual financial reports.[31] The implied point here is that the Sultan was simply taking the concessionary funds and spending them himself rather than through any specific regulatory or departmental authority, a situation the British were not very keen on. They make repeated points to "normalise" or create a "more orthodox financial arrangement" that that the resident would be happier with. This would lead to a somewhat comedic characterisation that the Sultan would describe the state finances in 1944 as "my treasury so it's alright", and the British admonishing this as a confusion between personal funds and state funds.[32] The Sultan clearly had financial issues and the discrepancies

[29] "File 38/15 oil concessions in Arabia and the Gulf (Muscat)" [23r] pp. 177–179, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/2/870, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100025657240.0x00002e> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[30] Letter from R. Daubeny to the Foreign Office on the Muscat state Budget and Budgetary concerns, "File 8/14 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT STATE FINANCES & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS." p. 275, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/196, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x00038b> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[31] Letter from R.D. Metcalfe, agent at the Residency in Muscat on the financial concerns of the Sultan and his dealings with the Bank of India, "File 8/14 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT STATE FINANCES & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.", pp. 281–283., British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/196, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x00038b> [accessed 11 May 2023]
[32] Ibid., pp. 291-294.

that were found within his finances by the British were a grave cause for the British during the second world war.

Considering the financial burden being placed on the Empire at large, it is not surprising that this would be looked at with some concern given the current state of Oman and the dawn of a more involved policy in the country. The Foreign Office mentions the effect that this would possibly have on the development of the oil concession but that this remains to be seen. This is when possibly the strangest of the developments of the finances of the Sultan become present.

In the summer of 1944, the Sultan thought of investing the monies gained from a fruitful year of trade, and against the advice of the Political Resident, decides to invest it in the Government of India Securities, and the advice got granular enough in the documents that the advisors were advising him to finance and invest in GOI loans in the name of the state rather than personally so as to avoid income tax.[33] The actions of the advisors as almost accountants to the Sultan goes to shows how close they were to the Sultan and the heart of administration. Their constant communication with the Sultan and the situation the state finances found themselves in 1945 were so satisfactory, however, that the British saw little or no need to comment on their development. Instead, the talked of the possibility of developing Oman and allowing the Sultan to purchase surplus naval equipment from the GOI. What remained of paramount issue, however, was the exclusion of oil concessionary monies, the expenditure of Dhofar, and the duty paid by the British Overseas Airways corporation in the State finances.[34] This is not entirely off brand, as the Sultan, based on previous statements had come to consider all these private affairs that the British did not need to fully get involved with. His reluctance to see the British involved in affairs of state while simultaneously relying on them for many things, including security, would come to be a hallmark of his regime. The Sultan's personal rule here shows the leanings he had during the war and after the war towards a more closed off and heavy-handed approach to finances. This approach would be replicated in his dealing with his own population and diplomatically with the British, Saudi's and the Imamate.

[33] "File 8/14 MUSCAT STATE AFFAIRS: MUSCAT STATE FINANCES & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS." pp. 282–283, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/6/196, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000831.0x00038b> [accessed 11 May 2023]., p. 321

[34] Ibid., pp. 371.

3. Towards the Post-war Reality

Not only were the finances a cause for concern in British government, Gwadar, and the region's incorporation into the British Raj was also a significant concern and aim for the Foreign Office. Burmah oil Company sought a concession from the Sultan in the early years of the 1910s, but it had been hushed for a reason not fully stated in documents.[35] More than likely the outbreak of the First World War put many of the economic and diplomatic efforts of the British overseas into a state of disarray. The gaining of Gwadar would remain an important foreign policy cornerstone for the British in Oman, with it being ceded to Pakistan in 1958, with the aid of British mediation.[36] The negotiations over oil concessions in Gwadar were a relatively small affair, though the Sultan remained intransigent to the British, with the development of an oil facility there being raised as an issue in the 1930s, but dismissed as a sale of Gwadar would be "most distasteful to him".[37] The British to an extent saw what they were doing in Oman to be modernising and correcting Oman in a way that would be acceptable to British interests in the Gulf, stabilising the regime and then creating a friendly state that would allow the British to keep friendly relations on the Arabian Peninsula. The Independence of India, Pakistan, and the loss of British prestige in the Indian Subcontinent would largely take primacy over Oman, however. The post-war reality for the Foreign Office would concern itself more with realpolitik between regional rivals and British issues of mandates in Iraq and Israel would be the forefront of issues in the 1940s.

Oil, important to the British abstractly, would not become a material issue until the end of the Second World War. The era of the 1920s through to the 1940s was largely one by which the Foreign Office was more concerned with the war than the Gulf which was quiet and largely away from the major fronts. Oil, however, would come to define the postwar relationship between the Omani Sultanate and the British Foreign Office. The years prior to the 1940s and 1950s, would largely be a time where the British would render aid as much as they could without risking too much themselves.

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[35] Plan of Gwadar District [33r] p. 1, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/378, f 33, in Qatar Digital Library <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023211324.0x000049> [accessed 17 May 2023]

[36] Jeremy Jones, *A History of Modern Oman* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 11–13. For more on the development of the deal to sell Gwadar to Pakistan see J. E. Peterson, "Britain and 'The Oman War': An Arabian Entanglement." Asian Affairs (London) 7, no. 3 (1976): 285–98 (291). https://doi.org/10.1080/03068377608729815.

[37] "File 22/16 III Gwadar" [10r] (19/48), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/1/380, in *Qatar Digital Library* <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023206980.0x000014> [accessed 22 May 2023]

Chapter 3: "In Muscat, Where British Influence has for so long been supreme" – An Analysis of British Records leading up to the Jebel Akhdar War

1. The Post–War Reality and Oman

Post-war Colonial and Foreign policy in Oman were a complicated landscape full of strategic hurdles for the British Empire. This chapter will analyse how British efforts to consolidate the oil industry in Oman through diplomatic means allowed for a more autocratic form of governance in Oman. This will be achieved through examining how the British state leveraged Oman, and led to the destruction of a political movement with deep roots in Omani history.[1] This would culminate in intervention in local conflicts that were intrinsic to foreign policy objectives and economic security in British perspective.[2] Oman, while an important part of the Middle East for seizing an independent oil frontier for the British, was largely an ignored part of the Arabian world until the mid-1930s for the British.

This chapter will deal with the influence of privately owned, state-supported oil companies that exploited Oman for its oil wealth, including the rights and privileges that the British would negotiate for on behalf of these companies, notably extraterritoriality and indefinite stay. The promise of oil itself was enough of an invitation for the British to support the exploration of the Omani interior and to negotiate with the Sultan. The de facto status of the Omani Sultanate as a protectorate also necessitated the protection of the British. This is especially substantial, considering the situation of realpolitik in the Middle East pitted the French, British and American neo-colonial powers against one another in a competitive fashion.[3] Oman, within this context, was a contentious point between neo-colonial entities and rushing modernity in the form of economic and social development. British involvement was justified through such development. However, the acts and statutes of the Sultan in this decade are despotic, and the reactive and ideological armed groups opposed to the Sultan, and by extension the British, pushed for a universal communist, socialist, or Arab front such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG).

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[1] Hussein Ghubash, *Oman – the Islamic Democratic Tradition* (trans. By Mary Turton), (London, 2006), pp. 137–139.

[2] John Newsinger, "Jebel Akhdar and Dhofar: footnote to empire." In *Race & Class* vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), pp. 41–59.

[3] John Slight, "Anglo-French Connections and Cooperation against "Islamic" Resistance, 1914–1917" in James. R. Fichter (ed.), *British and French Colonialism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East: Connected Empires across the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London, 2019), pp. 67-88 (69).

The Imamate experienced a resurrection in the 1950s. It was tangentially associated with the wider ORM (Omani Revolutionary Movement) which was, in turn, related to the PFLOAG. All these revolutionary organisations in the Omani area were concentrated in the south and the west of the country, the closer to their Saudi Arabian allies and the Yemeni border. The PFLOAG and the ORM represented a newer form of national Marxist movements in the Arabian gulf. One that was armed, organised, ideological and resistant to British intervention. It is clear to see that based on the language the Foreign Office used with the Sultan, in discussion with each other, and in memoranda to higher British officials that they considered the revolutionary organisations to be a threat. A threat not only to the credibility of the British in the Middle East, but also to British Economic interests in Omani oil and allegiance. It's significant to acknowledge that this posed not only a military threat to the British, but also an administrational one. The rise of communist rebellions in the formerly colonised led to many decolonial movements gaining a significant amount of traction and lessening British prestige in the world entirely. Labour and other movements calling for decolonial measures, even small ones, led to ineffectual policymaking, regardless of ideology, in the British Overseas Territories. This was a fact that those in Oman were keen to avoid, and as such they kept a tight hold on affairs throughout the middle of the reign of Said bin Taimur.

The organisations for the British involved included the Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Petroleum Concession's Limited (PCL), and the Anglo-Persian oil Company (APC). The British, Saudi, French and Yemeni peoples are all reliably involved according to the Foreign Office, war office, and power department documents within the National Archives. The sources take the form of memoranda, letters of intent between different officials in the colonial office, and minutes of meetings with the Sultan and his officials. Mention is also given to the Americans and Soviets allowing for a true showing of the power groupings within the Middle East during the Cold War and post-Second World War period. At the beginning of the 1940s and 1950s Oman's interior and the majority of 'Oman proper' was untouched by all concerned, the Sultan himself not extending his reach over all of Oman until 1976 when the Dhofar Rebellion was ceased.

The Sultan at this stage in Oman's history, was a despot. His rule was characterised by increasingly paranoid legal measures to prevent public and private assembly. He prohibited smoking, the wearing of sunglasses, using torches for light, and enforced a curfew in Muscat

every evening by closing the old Portuguese walls built during their occupation.[4] The Sultans demeanour regarding those he considered to be 'traitorous' to his regime in the 1940s and 50s is well documented.[5] He disallowed much of the western adoptions that other nations in the Middle East and Arab world were starting to adopt. By the 1960s, there were almost no education institutions and only three primary education schools. The Trucial Omani Scouts, the British training regiment posted in Muscat, built one of the only education facilities there.[6] These developments lead to the deficit in institutions that the Omani people suffered until the 1970s. British presence and influence in Oman, particularly Muscat, created a quasi-dependant relationship in more than defence because of this deficit. The Trucial Oman Scouts were the most significant military force in the area, with the interior imamate army being a pale adversary in comparison.

Colonial and economic policy in Britain was a field of politics that was in flux after the Second World War. John Maynard Keynes referred to this period as a 'financial Dunkirk' which forced the British government into heavy reliance on US financial, economic, and material pressure.[7] The Colonial Office, seen as the legacy holder of the Empire, was reformed slightly to put the forefront towards the 'development' of colonies. The post-war colonial era was defined by such landmark British political decisions such as the Colonial Development and Welfare act of 1945. This act put an estimated £330 million into the larger colonial holdings of the British Empire. Contemporaneous analysis of this policy development led to mutual scrutiny between the electorate and public officials within the department itself, with many seeing this as money being sent to colonies without their consent.[8] Historians of today, likewise have investigated the development of British colonial policy in the context of a developing idea of 'development' in an economic and social sense. Riley for example, argues that the Labour party of this era saw technical administration and top-down development programs through universal welfare programs as preferable to large-scale decolonial actions for the development of colonial entities.[9] This act would finance the development of many structural institutions within the larger British Empire, the most

[4] Ghubash, *Oman,* p. 197
[5] See Ghubash and Lambert for more on the Despotic acts of the Sultan during this time.
[6] Muna Al-Hammadi, *Britain and the Administration of the Trucial States, 1947–1965* (Abu Dhabi, 2017), pp. 63–65.
[7] Tancred Bradshaw, "The dead hand of the Treasury: The economic and social development of the Trucial States, 1948–60." *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 325-342 (326-327).
[8] E. R. Wicker, "Colonial Development and Welfare, 1929-1957: The Evolution of a Policy." *Social and Economic Studies* 7, no. 4 (1958): 170–92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27851186.
[9] Charlotte Lydia Riley, "'The Winds of Change Are Blowing Economically': The Labour Party and British Overseas Development, 1940s–1960s." in Andrew W.M. Smith, Chris Jeppesen (eds.) *Britain, France, and the decolonization of Africa: Future imperfect* (2017): 43-61 (52)9.

important being the Colonial Development Corporation (now renamed to the British International Investment).

These developments were landmark for the colonies, but protected states of the British empire, such as Oman and the Trucial states were not amongst them. The policy of the British dictating policy but not necessarily settling the bill for said policy is common in a time of British protection in the Gulf.[10] Foreign Entities within the British sphere of influence were coerced to keep in line by the promise of neglect. The Sultanate was heavily dependent on the British for defence but benefitted only in terms of security while being paid rent by British oil companies. This limitation on British policy in protected states vs colonies was ironically one of the main reasons for the poor developmental start to Oman and the Trucial states.

In terms of events, this chapter will deal with the build-up towards the Jebel Akhdar war (October 1954–January 1959). There have been myriad articles and books analysing the role that this conflict played in the development of the Sultanate's current political reality from a military perspective. This project, however, sits at the nexus of corporate-governmental-diplomatic culpability and has little inquiry into the conflict from the military perspective. The bureaucratic workings and diplomatic contacts within the British Foreign Office are what concern this project as it gives an approximation of British foreign policy and diplomatic protocol post-Second World War. Studying these documents will show how British officials furthered the creation of a state that would be friendly to the British, be beholden to British defence interests, and create a friendly state in the Gulf that could be a lynchpin for oil concerns. The investigation will look at how British protocol reflected new thoughts and motives behind certain decisions, chief among them the corporate interest in the Middle East rather than the old imperialism of the interwar years and early nineteenth century.

The significance of focusing on administration, economic, financial, and bureaucratic documents must be explored also. As many military historians have looked at these documents with a different scope in mind. Peterson, for example, uses them as a good background piece for his analysis of the insurgencies, and counterinsurgencies within the Sultanate and the significance certain decisions played on the military action. This perspective limits the research available and only quantifies things based on military events sidelining the particularly important aspect prior to these executions: policy building, making

[10] Tancred Bradshaw, *The End of Empire in the Gulf: From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London, 2020), p. 3.

and research. With these aspects in perspective, research can take a wider more nuanced view of developments in Oman in the context of growing British decolonial movements and differentiate itself from more micro military history niches.

2. Offices and Officials

British foreign policy in the aftermath of the Second World War reflected the governments that implemented them. British policy in the Middle East and Arabia has been one of countering the Pan-Arab movement, stymieing any influence of Communism, and competing with the French and Americans for the favour of specific autocratic rulers. The British interest in Oman is wholeheartedly related to the importance of both the Hormuz Strait as a shipping nexus, and a source of oil outside of Iran. Oman, both the interior and exterior, has been linked with Britain for a long time, and the early 1950s presented a challenge to British influence in the form of a renewed Imamate supported by Saudi Arabia. The Trucial Coast (modern UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain) was a nominal protectorate under the British and as such any slight was seen as a loss of prestige. This would become a key policy under the British and would inform much of their dealings with regional rivals within the area. The significance of the research gaps with regards to Oman are broad in this context and the documentation in the National Archives allows for a great study of this development.

In exploring the documents of the National Archives, a few challenges arose. Interrogating the veracity of specific documents is of paramount importance here, as the providence of these documents is a little obtuse to fully analyse. The Foreign Office of the British government holds acute biases in its documentation of course. Records of personnel, receipts, letters, memo drafts, and the typed setting are all cryptographically cyphered. Not only that but the 'memo, draft, final letter' form has significant problems in terms of the provenance of the document. For example, several stages during the process of drafting a letter, information that would be considered somewhat important will be partially redacted and instead reference to a previous letter not found within the archives will be suggested instead.[11] The framework for the analysis of these letters is made a little bit more difficult due to this specific consideration.

The reliance on candid information swapping between diplomatic officials between the 1930s and 1950s is a vital cornerstone of the investigative procedure. This gets slightly complicated in terms of the PDO and PCL however, since their records (which are the records of British Petroleum) are extremely difficult to access therefore allowing only the state perspective within this investigation. Another issue with this documentation makes itself known in partial or fully segmented issues. For example, several documents relating to the

[11] The implication here being that the previous reference would not be public access of course. During this research such a delineation of documentation has been observed at least 5 times, all to do with documents pertaining to the Energy Department of the UK.

creation of certain offices or military units would have several designations, some of which are only partially released. This creates a significant issue in the analysis of bureaucratic decisions in real time and hampers efforts to understand fully the implications of certain decisions.

3. The Post-War Decade

The reiteration of oil concession in the Huqf area is an important piece to begin with. This is a particularly seminal agreement as it predates the creation of both the PDO and PCL but indicates the policy points important to the British. Like many of the early twentieth century documents in the National Archives, represents a period from 1936–1949. The provenance of these documents is important to consider, as the archival agencies responsible for their handling likely had other, more pressing duties during the Second World War. While it does not throw the actual provenance into doubt, this is a principal element to consider given the context and contents of these pieces of information. This document, created between 1937 and 1945, which is titled "Muscat: oil concessions at Gwadar: Negotiations with Burmah oil Company and Indian oil Concessions Ltd." is collected in Political External Collection, an annex to the National Archives.

The beginning of the document immediately sets the stage for why the developments in Oman happened in the 1950s. Specifically the statement that "a moratorium on oil exploration in India and Gwadar (present day south-western coast of Pakistan) has been called until the war ends."[12] This is an important development in oil exploitation in Britain as they would scramble to find an independently accessible non-aligned source for oil. It seems an innocuous point but the moratorium on oil exploration is a crucial point for the development of the British oil exploration and exploitation industry. It suggests that for the industry to function correctly, there needed to be a situation in which they could leverage the military to create a stable situation. This would continue to be the critical component of the oil and diplomatic complex that had developed in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. The Colonial Office was the prime negotiator in this specific piece, as the government insisted on being the intermediary between the Sultanate and the Companies.[13] Gwadar was a holding of the Sultanate for many years, but its strategic proximity to the Indian mainland is clear to any who look at the reason for why the British were interested in seeing it come under their oil-jurisdiction.

Extrality became the most pressing issue in the aftermath of the Second World War in Oman. Chief among the preparatory issues for the British to lay the groundwork for an oil dominated economy whose parties beholden to the British government alone. Ideologically

[12] Coll 20/24 "Muscat: oil concessions at Gwadar: Negotiations with Burmah oil Company and Indian oil Concessions Ltd.", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/2984, pp. 1–3. A copy is digitally accessible via the *Qatari Digital Library* at https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000602.0x000210> [accessed 30 March 2023].
[13] Ibid, pp. 12–14

this would allow the British to act with impunity in far reaches of the empire and paint a veneer of legal justification on their policies. The government goes as far as to state that "the inclusion of a jurisdiction clause in a commercial concession is unnecessary" due to the "procedure to be followed in respect of British citizens in Kharan states, Las Bela or Kalat."[14] This suggests the *de facto* legal doctrine of in these jurisdictions was already being followed. While negotiations of this sort are not atypical in sources like this, the understanding that the British did not want to negotiate over such a powerful diplomatic win in their corner shows the careful consideration that went into the drafting of these agreements with the Sultanate. This discussion goes to set the tone for much of the British petroleum holdings in the middle east due primarily to the necessity of referring to British and European subjects in an extra-territorial fashion. British state subjects being referred to British courts rather than local courts in the case of civil and criminal cases is a very direct intervention in local affairs and is a major element of British colonialism.

This collection, which is dated between 1939–1945, seems to be some of the only correspondence between the British government and the state of Muscat and Oman for the period prior to the 1950s. It is an important document as that note on extraterritoriality (referred to as extrality in the documents) is a key point. This principle is reiterated again when documents become more numerous in the 1950s. Extrality was a major boon for the oil corporations in Muscat, as any specific issues that the Indigenous and local populations would have with the corporations had to be dealt with through the representative of the British. This would lead to a circumvention of local law in the case of much of the British oil exploitation arrangements. The sentiment is surmised by Fry, an agent at the Eastern Arabia department: "In Muscat, where British influence has for so long been supreme, would ever be likely to deteriorate to Saudi standards."[15] The case of Saudi was of particular concern to the British primarily due to the nature of the US relationship with Saudi. Conflict over Buraimi was also of peak concern as it would test the limit of British diplomatic power and Saudi regional influence in the region.

The beginning of the 1950s sees the unravelling of British diplomatic efforts in the Omani area. Arguing over specific redrafts of a document signed and created in 1839, which had granted them extrality, was of prime concern for the British. The debate over the redraft

[14] Coll 20/24 "Muscat: oil concessions at Gwadar: Negotiations with Burmah oil Company and Indian oil Concessions Ltd.", British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/12/2984, p. 17-18. [A copy is digitally accessible via the *Qatari Digital Library* at https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000000602.0x000210> [accessed 30 March 2023].
[15] Letter from L.A.C. Fry detailing the nature of Extrality in Oman, dated 28th August, 1950, The National Archives: FO 371/82031/EA 1056/19 p. 22.

of the commercial and diplomatic treaty between Oman and Britain would define much of the relationship between them going forward into the next three decades, and the British successes and failures show what the Foreign Office would be willing to compromise on. By the beginning of 1950, concerns over the erosion of extrality in the Gulf area were beginning to be raised. Oman and the Trucial States were one of the final areas that the British exercised this power in the Middle East, and officials were keen to keep it this way with oil companies comprised of British subject acting in these jurisdictions.[16] The British presence in Muscat was viewed as having a twofold effect, reinforcement of British Policy and advancement of British Prestige in the Persian Gulf. The fact of Oman as the last sovereign state that the British held extrality is an important one. British diplomatic corps were adamant on keeping this last remnant of direct power indefinitely. It is explicitly stated in this document how many countries would "criticise this on idealistic grounds, from those unwilling to accept the British position in the Persian Gulf, and for propaganda purposes" but that regardless "risk of criticism should be accepted."[17] The period was a turning point for the colonial office, and how the balance of things had to be kept in context in terms of the fall of the Raj in 1947, a tumultuous point in the history of the British Policy in the Middle East.

The Commonwealth Relations office would predict the acquisition of new territory by past British Colonies, which had been renamed "dependencies" in this treaty.[18] It is typical of the pre-emptive colonial and de-colonial turn that is exemplified here, the last breath of an empire, its grip beginning to loosen in Oman. Clive Rose, the main point of contact for the Omani branch of the Foreign Office, was serving as liaison between British Diplomatic corps and the Indian Government at this point.[19] He is important as a thematic personality, as his résumé is that of a cold war diplomat, his involvement in the British Delegation to NATO is well documented. His interaction with Rupert Hay, a similar delegation to colonial India, is well noted as being in line with "the norm of the government" in the case of extrality in the Omani area.[20] The norm, in this case, is the opinion of several older men who had retained much of their political opinions from the end of the Second World War puts into stark relief

[16] Commentary and argument on the drafting of a new treaty between HMG and the Omani Sultanate and comments on the past 1839 Treaty of Cooperation, dated September 1950, The National Archives: FO 371/82031/EA 1056/19, p. 31.
[17] Ibid., p. 33.
[18] Letter from Miss Storar of the Foreign Office to Mr. Jardine on the renaming of the Omani and gulf states as dependencies in the British case, dated September 18th, 1950. FO 371/82031/EA 1056/21, p. 59.
[19] Clive Rose, "Rose, Sir Clive (Martin)." in *Who Was Who*. Oxford University Press, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1093/ww/9780199540884.013.U33142.
[20] Letter from Miss R. Orde Browne to Miss Storar on the inclusion of the definition of 'Foreign Country', dated October 4th, 1950, The National Archives: FO 371/82031/EA 1056/19 p. 68.

their opinion on colonial residencies. Hay, Rose, Wood-Ballard, Chauncy, and the Sultan are the most important parties with regards to this treaty. However, even with all the weight of British diplomatic expertise behind them, extrality was not kept, and conflicting opinions in the Foreign Office left it to be considered "outmoded".[21] The top officials themselves even comment on this loss with Chauncy remarking on the "pity of not retaining extra-territoriality" more than likely anticipating the issues that this would present with oil interests.[22]

The treaty negotiations ended with a prolongation of the agreement, and no tangible evidence of development of the diplomatic relationship other than that the Sultan seems not to be interested in reviving negotiations for some time. It is clear in this case that the arrested development is frustrating for them. Several points during the documents do Chauncy, Hay, and Rose refer to the Sultan as 'missing' or 'absent' from Muscat.[23] The absence of the sovereign from the capital sets the scene for the internal politicking of the Omani state. By this stage, the British officials have remarked privately of their frustration that the Sultan is being obtuse and shielding himself from criticism from the other by employing British Officials but not actually doing much diplomacy with them. It goes as far as the resident Foreign Secretary for the Sultan, Woods-Ballard, asks to be removed and has significant anxiety of not being left to do his work.[24] The Foreign Office at large rejects this, with the implication of further work to be done in the area:

> It seems to us probable that in places like Muscat and Kuwait, the First essential is to gain the Ruler's confidence; and only the passage of time can ordinarily achieve that.[25]

It is fitting that this is the desire that is put forth by the office at large, as the immediate aftermath of this piece is the fitness of Woods-Ballard to serve as a liaison between the Concessions company limited and the Sultan. The furtherance of British Economic power within Oman, and the security of oil supply was clearly the paramount point of importance for the larger apparatus of the British Foreign Office. The Office describes this

[21] Commentary and argument on the drafting of a new treaty between HMG and the Omani Sultanate and comments on the past 1839 Treaty of Cooperation, and its automatic promulgation in 1939, dated September 1950, The National Archives: FO 371/82031/EA 1056/19, p. 27–35.
[22] Ibid, p. 94.
[23] A variety of sources, chiefly letters between the resident consul, and the Political resident concerning the location of the Sultan at various times of the year, The National Archives: FO 371/82031/EA 1056/19 pp. 118, 66, 99.
[24] Letter from the British resident in Bahrain to G.W. Furlonge, dated 18th November 1951, The National Archives: FO 371/98245/EA 1059/1 pp. 2–5.
[25] Letter from L.A.C. Fry regarding the position of Wood-Ballard in the confidence of the Sultan, The National Archives: FO 371/98245/EA 1537/1. pp. 6–7.

issue quite standardly, referring to how there is need to 'facilitate' the setting up of the Huqf oil Area, and the security apparatus required there also. It also gives an interesting lens into the authority of "the Imam" the first such titling of the adversary to the Sultan. In reference to the acquisition of the Huqf oil concession and the creation of an area for piping, they state how "the Sultan is by nature so cautious that he would hardly have agreed … if he thought it would offend the Imam" showing that the Sultan had a somewhat significant fear of confronting the Imam.[26] This tension, and the British furthering of the oil concession would paint the scene for the ignition of conflict between the Imam and Sultanate.

With the turn of 1952, the aims of the British government are clear, they intend an armed party to go to Huqf and facilitate the company to "enter Oman with a view to exploring it's oil possibilities."[27] With the interest of the PCL (Petroleum Concessions Limited) piqued, the Treasury Department had also been contacted, and weighed in. They state that "every effort should be made to enable this exploration."[28] This interdepartmental mentality with regards to economic diplomacy and trade has been well established at this stage. The Foreign Office, treasury department and the position of the Cabinet were tightly wound to work together to facilitate the exploitation of oil and gas in Oman, as well as the proper ordering of a quasi-colonial reality for the ruler and his subjects. This series of issues also raises the interesting relationship that the Petroleum Concessions Ltd. had with the Foreign Office. Based on the writing of Roderick Sarell, a long-time career British Diplomat, there was significant anticipation on behalf of the PCL to get a security force set up on Masirah Island and Huqf up and running to allow for an expedition to collect geological samples.[29] The significance of this statement lies in the fact that this force would be raised on Masirah Island, extend into the Interior along the coast, and be funded by the Sultan when oil revenues would begin to pay, foreshadowing the military complex that would begin to take form in Oman under the British.

It seems also that Mr Bird, the representative of the company to the Sultan, was assured and played an almost diplomatic role in this operation. Bird in this case is asking for an expense account that the British Government would have so that they could pay for the

[26] Letter from L.A.C. Fry regarding the position of Wood-Ballard in the confidence of the Sultan, The National Archives: FO 371/98245/EA 1537/1, pp. 11–12.
[27] The National Archives: FO 371/98245/EA 1537/2, pp. 15–16.
[28] Letter from Treasury department representative Rory Headley-Miller to D.N. Lane dated 29th January 1952 to the Foreign Office dated The National Archives: FO 371/98425/EA 1537/2 (A), p. 20.
[29] Letter from R.F.G. Sarrell to W.R. Hay, with intent to copy for Whitehall dated 21st March 1952, FO 371/98425/EA 1537/5.

arming, retrofitting, and raising of the force that the Sultan would need.[30] There is a detail of particular significance here. Bird and Lawson, both representatives of the PCL are also representatives of the Iraq Petroleum company. The layering of specific private interests on top of one another is a facet of the monopolistic prowess of these oil companies. Serving as board hold members and different representatives for different countries in a capacity like the British diplomatic service shows the hand-in-glove nature of British economic exploitation and diplomatic efforts.[31] Serving on oil boards, leveraging that position, and then meeting with the Sultan are all indicative of this later colonial era in the British empire. The economic nature of the diplomatic shorthand between the company and the Sultan within the Foreign Office has rarely been interrogated in historiography, making this relationship an almost stereotypical example with regards to petroleum politics but one unresearched in the Omani context, nonetheless.

The axis of diplomacy, oil exploitation and appeasement of local ruler is clear in these cases. PCL was strategically placed to be the financier of this force in Huqf, which a document dated to 1952 lays out in strenuous detail. The round cost comes to a total of 15,47,600 Indian rupees.[32] Using in-house conversion shorthand, 13.5 rupees to every pound, 114,637 pounds were to be forwarded by the PCL to outfit and raise the required force in the Huqf area.[33] There is an almost precipitous tone in the documents hereafter. The Jebel Akhdar war that would come about in two years' time would very clearly be the natural extension of this armament raising and military equipping. As an addendum at the end of this, the diplomatic correspondence refers to how "the ground must be prepared carefully" to not upset the Imam of "Central Oman".[34] The force itself would be comprised not only of levies from the Muscat and Omani populations but also from the Aden Protectorate, which was at

[30] Letter from R.E. Bird to Sarell of the Foreign Office dated March 25th, 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98425/EA 1537/6 (A), p. 54.
[31] To see how oil companies would generally meet to create new companies for specific purposes while retaining personnel into both companies see James Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, Volume 3 1950-1975* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 358–364.
[32] Provisional expense list for the Huqf force to be raised within the year, dated March 31st, 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98245/EA 1537/8 (G), p. 78.
The Indian Rupee was used as the *de facto* currency when dealing with other nations until the mid-1960s. The actual currency conversion rate is difficult to ascertain but the Document usefully provides a shorthand analysis of £10,000 to ₹135000, which gives an in-house conversion rate of 1:13.5. For more information on the Sterling Area and the use of the Rupee in the Gulf area see Matteo Legrenzi and Bessma Mamani, *Shifting Geo-Economic Power of the Gulf: oil, Finance, and Institutions* (London, 2011). Also note the count conversion convention (10,00,000 instead of 1,000,000).
[33] Based on data from the Office for National Statistics, accounting for inflation, best estimates amount this to £5,020,795.59 today.
[34] Letter from R.E. Bird to Sarell of the Foreign Office dated March 25th, 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98425/EA 1537/6 (A), pp. 54–56.

the time under British control. This manner of British expertise-local militia is a well-trod path for British imperial expression.[35] The Diplomacy–Industry–Defence pipeline shows the lengths the British would go to secure a basis for oil exploitation. The Gulf area and its specific distance from the Iranians is especially important to these diplomats. They would guarantee the protection of the setup force through what they refer to as the APL's (Aden Protectorate Levies).[36] The raising of this force created a tangible vacuum in Aden, with the governor then petitioning the Secretary of the Colonie for the finance and powers to raise more levies for the APL so as to counter any backlog issue they may have.[37] It is clearly delineated throughout these documents that the Whitehall machinations in this case created a militarised environment, one that would aid the Sultan in the repression of the Imamate, and throw the Omani populace into a fraught conflict that would put cold war tensions in the Middle East to the forefront.

The colonial office at this stage, trying to force the Sultan to renegotiate a concessionary agreement, decide to send word to the Imam negotiate an agreement with him also so as to have both ends covered.[38] A short but illuminating exchange at the tail end of 1952 show how the PCL were willing to go negotiate with the Imam, as they feared that his agents were heading to find oil. This, however, is shot down, by Chauncy, who remarks that the Sultan's position vis a vis the Buraimi dispute put all negotiations that he has with the British government into question. This is due to the backing that the US have given the Saudi, and by proxy the Imamate. Should they disagree with the Sultan on the Border post-political or concessionary agreement, then the Sultan's hold of Buraimi and potency in the Arabian Peninsula may be called into question. This would be a disparagement of the Sultan and create somewhat of a diplomatic issue between the British and Omani.

Not only would the Buraimi dispute become more public, but it would also call into question the *actual* authority of the Imam in these matters, given the decentralisation of the Imamate. In this case, the British would prefer a ruler with absolute control over a minor area and a claim to the larger, rather than an unknown who would brook no foreign supporter other than other Arab communities. It is interesting that this is floated however, the specific

[35] Tim R. Moreman, "'Small Wars' and 'Imperial Policing': The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919–1939" in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 4 (1996): 105–131 (106,108–109).
[36] Message from Middle East Air Ministry to the Air Ministry Headquarters in London dated May 23rd, 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98425/EA 1537/9, p. 91.
[37] Letter from D.N. Lane to Sir Rupert hay dated 16th July 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98425/EA 1537/12, p. 100.
[38] Foreign Office telegram to Bahrain Residency, dated 24th November 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98441/EA 15322/2, p. 3.

point of this negotiations is a contentious point for the Iraq Petroleum Company, and clearly the frustration with pipeline development is being felt in the higher ups. The context of this development is the ongoing crisis of the nationalisation of the Iranian oil fields, which would destabilise much of the Gulf area and lead to a lessening of British and Western influence more widely.[39]

Throughout these documents too there is an interesting point in terms of the usage of certain words and the broader topic of 'diplomatic language'. This is significant as how communication occurred both within the department and with those they encountered, is the context for policy making. Based on observations of these documents, marginalia exist to set the tone of the documents as a specific want of the higher diplomatic correspondent. For example, the last document makes mention of the Sultan's 'country' only for it to be crossed out and an annotation written above "Imamate is in our area and Sultan's territory therefore is within the area."[40] While it is not entirely clear from the discussion who is writing what, it can be safely assumed that this draft would have been pencilled or typed and then given for confirmation to the assignee. Despite the need to further elucidate the receiver of this document, they were still careful not to define the entire 'country' as the Sultan's territory, even in internal communiqués. Diplomatic language is a newly studied phenomenon but is of critical importance for the retrospective analysis of these settings and events in history, specifically here we see the phenomenon of signalling.[41] Decoding the intent behind this specific language is important, as it shows the Foreign Office to a point were not interested in seeing the Sultan as a fully independent entity. Instead, the view was more of a specific choice of his eligibility and authority as sovereign. It is a point that is raised consistently throughout these documents of an infantilising tone relative to the apparatus of the British government. Examining how this would translate into policy is outside the scope of this project but it would be interesting to examine how the specific language of diplomatic communiqués influences actions taken by the officials on the ground. The concern here, however, is that this language will be influencing the raising of a force to extend and solidify the authority of the Sultan in areas that were not considered within his strength at that point in time.

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[39] Steve Marsh, "Anglo-American crude diplomacy: Multinational oil and the Iranian oil crisis, 1951–53." *Contemporary British History* 21, no. 1 (2007): 25–53 (32).
[40] Draft letter at the end of a series of documents detailing the interactions with the Sultan at the end of 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98441/EA 15322/7, p. 11.
[41] Christer Jönsson, *Diplomacy, Communication, and Signalling*. (London 2016), pp. 79–84.

This point in the document series begins the long and upcoming prologue to the outbreak of the Jebel Akhdar war. The war itself has been analysed with a minute focus by military historians since the 1970s. What concerns this project is the diplomatic lead up to the war which refers to the geopolitical considerations of such a conflict occurring in the region. Consul-General Chauncy gives an apt and frank discussion of the significance of the situation with the Buraimi oasis and how important it is for the office to consider the situation with extreme care though 'at this point given the establishment of the Saudi Amir [Emir] in Buraimi, I fear this debate is academic' referring to one of the earliest points of the crisis.[42] This was when an ARAMCO convoy, under the protection of an alleged CIA backed armed force on the border of Oman, the UA, and Saudi, invaded an Oasis at the behest of a sheikh and sent a representative to say that they were under the protection of the Saudi forces. This would begin an extensive line of issues for Muscat and the Sultanate, which would begin the conflict with Imam Ghalib, due to the man in questions alliance with the Imam. This emir, not prevalent in the messaging of the British diplomatic service was in fact the Sheikh of one of the closer governates to Saudi Arabia and sought a significant amount of independence from Muscat. According to Morton, sought a means to leverage oil wealth as part of his independence and used this as a bargaining chip with Saudi.[43] The British state had a general reluctance to get immediately involved in this dispute given the lack of preparation, and by November the Chancery raised this as an issue with the Foreign Office stating:

> We have only the sketchiest information as to the purpose, size, proposed means of administration, and control of this force … send us 'on half a sheet of paper' a summary of these proposals … intelligence agencies have a direct interest in these sorts of forces raised under Middle East Command.[44]

The intent of the intelligence agencies aside the chancery was clearly concerned about the misuse of assets in the Omani country and were hesitant to sign off without more given in detail. It is of note that in most of these considering documents, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden is mentioned by name significantly more than previously. It makes sense as the events ramp towards a confrontation he would be looped in as the 1950s progressed. The draft agreement to supply the Sultan with monies adequate to pay for the Huqf force also proves illuminating. Bird in this document refers to the Huqf force not as a military unit as

[42] Letter detailing the issues that are pressing regarding the Buraimi dispute, dated 4th September 1952, The National Archives: FO 371/98426 1538/108/52 p. 11.
[43] Michael Quentin Morton, *Buraimi: the struggle for power, influence, and oil in Arabia* (Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 88–90.
[44] Letter from the Chancery to the Political Resident of Bahrain dated 6th November 1952, FO 371/98426 1538/108/52 p. 34.

has been previously established but instead as a "state police force."[45] Speculating on the change of vernacular and reference, it's possible that by the end of 1952, there was a somewhat different environment around the rush for oil in certain parts of the Middle east that started to sour in the mouths of people in the UK. This is typical of the time for the British too, where actions of the British Army of a colonial nature were largely camouflaged in a softened almost routine tone, such as the Malayan 'Emergency' rather than a revolt and the 'Troubles' rather than a Civil War in Northern Ireland.[46] Perhaps attaching their company to an overt military force rather than say a policing unit would be better marketing. The year ended with little in the way of tangible ground gained between the Sultan and the oil company, no draft agreement was agreed due to an error in the proposal and there was significant disagreement between the PCL and the Foreign Office over the wording of the agreement. The issue arises from the problem of fixing a sum to which the Sultan will agree to. This document series however does end with a piece that illuminates the relationship the Foreign Office has with the chiefs-of-staff committee.

The committee recommended and inquired as to the possibility of a show of force situation that would warn Saudi Arabia against further encroachment into Omani and Trucial Coast lands. This heightens the tensions considerably and reveals the underlying geopolitical competition for oil in the area with Saudi and America knocking.[47] It is interesting to note how uncoordinated the war office and Foreign Office seem to be here despite the Foreign Office making decisions that could implicate the personnel of the War Office and military at large. The independent decisions of the Foreign Office, the IPC involvement, and the funding of the Huqf force all detail the severe lack of clarity the British had on the ground in Oman. By the end of 1952, these issues had become no clearer and persisted until 1953. Throughout most of these discussions, the Sultan was not even in Muscat, he was invariably drawn between various parts of the Arabian Peninsula, nominally based on these documents, Salalah and Gwadar. Not only was the lack of clarity from the sovereign an issue for the Foreign Office, presuppositions on the development of the populace surrounding oil and military operations were also in question. There is consistent reference made to the "primitivity" of

[45] Draft agreement for provisioning of the Huqf force between PCL and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman dated November 1952, FO 371/98426 1538/108/52 p. 50.
[46] See Mark McGovern, "State violence and the colonial roots of collusion in Northern Ireland" in *Race & Class* 57, no. 2 (2015): 3–23. for a point on Northern Ireland and Baillargeon, David. "Spaces of occupation: Colonial enclosure and confinement in British Malaya." *Journal of Historical Geography* 73 (2021): 24–35 (29).
[47] Notes by the Secretariat of the Chiefs of Staff of the British Army dated 19th December 1952, FO 371/98426 EA1537/3. p. 74.

the area in Huqf and the need to establish presence there.[48] By March 1953, the Huqf force's recruitment and training development was stilled. There were significant concerns as to whether a Commandant could be found for the Force, and whether the area for the raising of forces is in the right place vis a vis British, Omani, and oil company concerning. There was little concern on the British or Corporate side as to the speed or efficacy of this force. There is some mention of how this force would cause some consternation in the areas where the Sultan will draw the levies from (referred to a Batinah) but they dismiss it as "his problem to deal with."[49] Its alluded to throughout this document series that the issue of the Huqf force not being raised was the Monsoon season and monsoon weather in general hindering their efforts at organisation.

In an effacing irony, the documents turn to the propaganda efforts of the Saudi's in the Imamate and Oman at large, talking of how they are "wilfully spreading the idea the our forces in Muscat with the Sultan … will over-run them and bring them under their control."[50] The idea of a 'show of force' to scare the Saudis a few moths prior to this is not in the memory of the Foreign Office as they lambast this as a serious hurdle to the development of safe and exploitable oil infrastructure in Oman. As this line of inquiry continues the British offices make a consistent mention of the need to counter the American presence and protect the IPC's activities from the American encroachment. They state how the Sultan has made contact and has stated that they should not go "further than the Coast up to Shuwaimaiyah." It's interesting to note also that they state that he prevented them from going to Mugshin, one of the main areas the IPC were looking to investigate.[51] The British also found somewhat limited resistance in their own ranks from Wilfred Thesiger who, to use the words of the Foreign Office verbatim, "feared any intrusion of western civilisation – especially oil companies … among the Arab Tribes."[52] This comes from a report by the brother of Thesiger who was in the Intelligence department of the British office in Egypt at the time of writing.

Wilfred Thesiger was a seasoned explorer, travel writer and military officer. He is most well known for writing an account of his travels in the Rub Al' Khali *Arabian Sands*. Thesiger had some limited influence in Oman and was seen as a radical figure in these

[48] Foreign Office Minutes dated 15th December 1952, FO 371/98426 EA1537/33. p. 74.
[49] Telegram from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs dated 13th March 1953, FO 1016/250 1208/57/53, p. 43.
[50] Letter with Attached Intelligence Report from Chauncy to the Political resident in Bahrain, Sir Rupert Hay, Dated 19th March FO 1016/250 1208/59/53 p. 40.
[51] Letters from Chauncy to Burrows, resident in Bahrain dated October 1953, Notes by the Secretariat of the Chiefs of Staff of the British Army dated 19th December 1952, FO 1016/294 153730. p. 74.
[52] Chancery Letter to the Eastern Department, general, dated 23rd March 1953, FO371/104359

documents. There is some disagreement over whether Thesiger himself is radically opposed to everything the British are doing in Oman and Buraimi but also how is insights into the Emir who had occupied Buraimi in August of 1952, Turki, had been a considerable obstacle to any movement towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis.[53] The Emir in question, Emir Turki Bin Abdullah al'Otaishan, has remained relatively anonymous in the case of the Buraimi crisis though, and is mentioned passingly in the sources in these document series. Morton makes mention of him on his text about the Crisis. In his party was a medical doctor from Germany who had escaped a British POW camp in Egypt and had been living in Saudi since his escape. He recounts how the party were ambushed by Bedouins on the way to Buraimi and how Turki remarked that the "[p]eople of the Oasis have ever been loyal to our house" and that they seek to "supplant the British and their Puppet in Muscat."[54] It is clear that the British were frustrated with this turn of events, it had nearly been 6 months since this crisis began and only in the next few weeks would the Sultan decide on where to draft the recruits for the Huqf force from.[55] The PCL, on behalf o the Iraq Petroleum Company, had agreed months prior to both finance this out of pocket prior to the Sultan getting rents for the oil pipelines.

The frustration is relayed through the Foreign Office but the policy of being intermediary between company and Sultan exemplifies the outsized role the bureaucracy would play in this point within the issues. They set themselves as the organizer of the force and began recommending different people to serve as commandant of the force.[56] The interfacing and implication of British discretionary policy making and military strength in Oman cannot be overstated. There is mention even of the Admiralty doing a reconnaissance mission southward and for the RAF to do a flyover to reconnoitre the middle area later in 1953.[57] By the end of 1953 the Foreign Office begins adopting more militaristic language as has been shown. They go from being diplomatic meanderings over dealings with the Sultanate and Imamate in general to developing a more cohesive dialogue about the efficacy of military and naval manoeuvres and scouting. This is significant due to the ongoing tension between the Imamate and the Sultanate is over British influence in the area, and as the British

[53] Letters from A.D.M. Ross to D.G. McCarthy on the intelligence report provided from Thesiger's Brother, dated 31st March 1953, FO 371/104359 EA 1201/52, p. 7.
[54] Quentin Morton, *Buraimi*, p. 95.
[55] Letter from Sgt. Dennis Greenhill to the Under-Secretary of State, dated 2nd of April 1953, FO 371/104359 EA 1201/57, p. 11.
[56] Letter from T.C Rapp in A.D.M. Ross on the proficiency of different commandant candidates, dated 30th of April 1953, FO371/104359 EA1201/71
[57] Ciphered telegram between Burrows and Foreign Office, dated 15th October 1953, FO 1016/294 EA2/73/53

armed forces make themselves more present in the area through the creation of bases and units in the Huqf area would drive tensions. This, however, is not articulated in any part of the document series examined. The FO instead sees the responsibility of securing the authority of the Sultanate as paramount to the British effort in the Middle East, especially to secure a route for oil circumventing the Strait of Hormuz.

To this effect the projection of British Diplomacy and its physical ramifications are suggested throughout the latter half of 1953, specifically that of the PCL as a British agent. Chauncy suggests in a letter that the "company should make every effort to help the Sultan build his road … from here to Sohar, perhaps with bulldozers and graders?"[58] The hand-in-glove nature of military aid and infrastructural development is not novel for the British in Oman. The relationship between military engineering, civilian infrastructure, and the role that militaries play in urban and suburban build-up has been examined prior by historians such as Pedro Luengo-Gutiérrez.[59] This sort of infrastructural development is a kind of expression of the power that reinforces the legitimacy of occupation, as was seen in former British colonies like Jamaica and Cuba.

Explicit mention of the non-interventionist policy the British would prefer to take is present throughout the archival materials and showcases how the British would be forced into taking drastic measures to save face. Pre-Jebel Akhdar intervention, the Foreign Office explicitly states how they seek not to aid the Sultan in his efforts to physically control the majority of Oman. It would be too costly in their perspective and hurt their prestige in the Gulf Area at large.[60] They are willing however, to enable the PCL in general to create the infrastructure for the security force to have lesser culpability and make it seem as though they are contracted by a legitimate local authority and concern. It seems more likely here that they are engaging in a wilful denial and allowing themselves to remain neutral. It might also be the case, since the negotiations were taking place relatively soon, that the British wanted to retain as much diplomatic credo with Saudi Arabia regarding the Buraimi oasis rather than forcing their hand.[61] It makes sense then that they would prefer to have all the British

[58] Letter from Chauncy to Martin LeQuesne dated 8th of October 1953, FO 1016/294 EA 2/67/53, p. 56.
[59] See Pedro Luengo-Gutiérrez, Gene A. Smith (eds.), *From Colonies to Countries in the North Caribbean: Military Engineers in the Development of Cities and Territories* (Newcastle, 2016) for more examples of the British Military building civilian infrastructure.
[60] Departmental Memo drafter by Mr. Burrows, dated 16th December 1953, FO 371/104316 EA1081/1145, p. 41.
[61] Summary Record of a Meeting to Discuss Details of a Draft Arbitration Agreement on The Saudi Arabian Frontier Dispute dated December 11th, 1953, FO 371/104316 EA1081/1151.

personnel, or at least personnel related to the British Military that Bureaucracy, somewhat out of the locale by the time the Buraimi crisis started to gain significant momentum.

The foreign office illuminates further the significance of these disputes with Saudi Arabia, specifically that the Saudi Government's demands about 'posts' which refer to defensive staffed outposts, must be depopulated and withdrawn from the area to allow for a successful ruling by the international Tribunal set up to deal with the crisis diplomatically. On Christmas Day of 1953, the Foreign Office had decided that the Buraimi dispute had to be resolved with one point in mind from it, that the oil companies in the area were continued to allow their work uninhibited by the Saudis or any force loyal to the Saudis.[62] The course of the early 1950s had followed a predictable route so far. The British government doing everything it could to ameliorate the Sultan so he could allow the oil companies access to where they could gain strategic commercial quantities of oil. 1953 ends much the same, this time with the stakes higher, a territorial dispute between regional rivals (trucial states and Saudi Arabia) backed by international rivals (the USA and the UK), all to see who would get the greatest possibility of finding oil. The document series even ends with the need to set the proper tone in arbitration agreements:

> I much hope we shall be able to make this point of territorial integrity a point of the arbitration agreement … if we insist on getting oil for ourselves our whole attitude would appear to be dictated by selfish oil policy.[63]

This diplomatic situation over Buraimi sets the stage for the Jebel Akhdar war and puts into stark relief the policy of the Foreign Office in setting as much of a calm field for oil operations as diplomatically and bureaucratically possible. A significant point to reaffirm, oil in commercial quantities had yet to be found *anywhere* in Oman. It makes taking the British Foreign Office at its word about creating a friendly environment for oil companies a little bit murky. There were clearly more concerns than the simplicity of oil means security. As is common with any analysis of the role that oil plays in the policy of western powers in the Middle East, the simplistic reasoning of oil means invasion is confused in most cases. Oman is no different. The British had strategic and foreign goals to aid here rather than any concrete oil plans, in fact as is repeated often in this series, the place is "geologically promising" but holds no value as of now. This plays into the greater goal of British foreign policy post-Second World War of trying to leverage their position in both the oil market and against the

[62] Document detailing possible outcomes of the international tribunal set up to debate on the Buraimi Dispute, dated December 25th 1953, FO 371/104316 EA 1081/1157, p. 81.
[63] Telegram from Mr. Burrows to the wider Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, dated 25th December 1953, F0371/104316 EA1081/1158, p. 84

United States, to avoid spending money for energy. Oman was clearly an important concern for the Foreign Office and important at large for creating this paradigm.

4. Jebel Akhdar and War's Momentum

With this specific point of inflection, the document series quickly ramps towards the Jebel Akhdar war. There is a considerable time jump in documents from the Foreign Office from Christmas 1953 to June 1954, several weeks before the outbreak of conflict. Letters from the Imamate however, dated earlier in the year and are of some significance. There is little in the Foreign Office documentation that has not been examined in a military history context, but the broad points are still necessary to explore, specifically the Imam of Oman has passed, and his successor Ghalib bin Ali has been chosen.[64] Ghalib would be the main head of the Imamate during its brief resurgent conflict with the Sultanate for the duration of British support and quasi-domination. From here it is important to understand that documentation becomes stagnant as things take a turn for the episodic. Not only that, but the documents this project keep at the forefront tend to take a backseat in favour of more militaristic and dynamic orderings that simply have little or nothing to do with the purview of diplomacy and bureaucracy. The role of the diplomatic corps, bureaucracy of the Foreign Office, and the larger continuum of British influence in Oman does not dissolve here however, and after the Jebel Akhdar war concludes in 1959 there is a renewing of interest in the region.

By 1956, British influence in the Middle East would reach a zenith. With the nationalisation of the Suez Canal the British felt a need to assert their primacy again in the region. This crisis was followed by disastrous policy of support for an Israeli intervention and justification for their own intervention with France in 1956. The Suez Crisis precipitated the fall of the British Empires credibility in the region in the ensuing years and. It would lead to the resignation of Anthony Eden, the PM who had overseen much of the Foreign Office's work in Oman and Iran. Though their influence waned, British activities did not cease, and they would intervene in Oman the following year, in Jordan in 1958, and in Kuwait in 1961. In the aftermath of the disastrous withdrawal from the Palestinian territories, the Suez Crisis, and the ongoing Arab Nationalist movements, the British Empire was waning in power significantly. This time is considered the beginning of the "End of the British Empire."[65] At the very least, this event was the watershed for Britain no longer being considered a superpower and is indicative of British decline in the post-Second World War international order.

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[64] Translation of a letter dated 30th of Shaban (May 5, 1954) from the Imam of Muslims, Ghalib Bin Ali to the Representative of the British government, attached to a dispatch from the British Residency in Bahrain to the Foreign Office F01016/354 EA123/4/54, p. 73.

[65] Lawrence James, *The Rise, and Fall of the British Empire* (St. Marks, 1997), pp.24-26.

Chapter 4: "It is important the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman Should remain controlled in Friendly Hands" – The Aftermath of Jebel Akhdar, and British Rehabilitation during the 1960s

1. Changing of the Diplomatic Guard

Jebel Akhdar, Suez, and the intervention in Jordan were the final straws for the old guard in the Foreign Office and Cabinet. Anthony Eden's resignation in 1957 cleared the way for Harold Macmillan's decisive turn post-Suez. The decision for intervention in Oman was the decisive blow to the fomenting rebellion and would be a considerable blow to the nascent Imamate. It would also change the character of resistance to the British and the Sultanate in southern and interior Oman to one of Occupier vs Occupied in the minds of insurgents. This chapter will cover the British Foreign Offices documentation for the 1960s. This includes the development of civil and economic relations with the Sultanate, leading up to the coup in 1971. By this point in time, in the 1950s, the British government's support for the Sultanate would be under scrutiny. A cabinet paper written by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1960 suggests that they should either "commit to the policy of … continued support or abandon the Sultanate altogether."[1] Although the reality in the region of the Middle East had changed for the British, the reasoning for intervention and support remained the same as in the early 1950s. This same cabinet paper, drafted in 1960, makes mention of the possibility of "a third the amount of Kuwaiti oil production possible" within Oman.[2] This cabinet paper is a useful starting point for the investigation into the 1960s and the ensuing policies the Foreign Office would pursue there. Specifically, how the tack in the office would go from realpolitik perspective of the importance of building up the Sultanates armed forces, to civil development, roads, housing, and education. This would be precipitated by an exchange of letters that Selwyn Lloyd would ratify in 1958.[3] Other research has tended to focus on the wider developments in the Middle East in this period and as a result, there is a clear gap in the research that scholarship on Oman in detail can fill.

What the 1960s would also bring is the first actual striking of oil in commercial quantities in Fahud, in central Oman.[4] This was an area which had been earmarked in the past by some of the exploratory groups sent by the Iraq Petroleum Company and would form the

[1] A cabinet paper drafted by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated July 1960, CAB 129/102/4, p. 82.
[2] Ibid, p. 83
[3] Exchange of Letters between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman concerning the Sultan's Armed Forces, Civil Aviation, Royal Air Force facilities and Economic Development in Muscat and Oman, London, 25 July 1958 (CMND 507)
[4] Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, and Richard Muir, *British Missions Around the Gulf, 1575–2005: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman*, (Leiden, 2008), p. 235.

basis for the beginning of the PDO's (Petroleum Development Oman) growth in the interior of the country. This is also the area that the British military were interested in redeveloping after the Jebel Akhdar war, as many people after that war were displaced, and the main city closest to Fahud, Nizwa, was in a state of relative disrepair. The aftermath of the Jebel Akhdar war was that the cordoned area surrounding the initial sortie location was under immediate military jurisdiction. The British Army instated a governor for the area, and afterwards began a period of occupying territory on behalf of the Sultan. The Sultan, in July of 1959, had been strongly advised by the resident in Bahrain to occupy the area with the help of the British and begin reconstruction of the larger area.[5] Maxwell, the appointed governor, immediately began to start surveying the damage done to the area surrounding the mountain. He found that the destruction of the surrounding area, and the bombing of the area by the British, had destroyed natural aquifers and drainage ditches that the Omani had been using in that area. Some of these *aflaj* were being used for the past two millennia according to some sources.[6] Their destruction in the conflict was one of the main and early points the Maxwell would use to argue for a whole and furthering development plan in the Interior of Oman. His recommendation to the Government in June of 1959, almost four months after the cessation of conflict was the largescale and intensive development of the land. He outlines this in the 'general provisions' of one such recommendation:

> In retrospect, order and construction are beginning to emerge out of what was disorder and chaos four months ago … the feeling of despair has turned to hope and gratitude for the help given them.[7]

The development of the Interior around this area would continue under Maxwell for several years, but this step is what would be vital in the beginning of the development of policy by the British in Oman. The Foreign Office now had essentially been put into the role of civil governance in Oman after the rebellion had ended, and with the considerable resources that the British military had in engineering, construction, and policing, there came to be a period under the British that is exemplified by the word 'reconstruction.' This hearts and minds campaign that the British embarked on was a strategy twofold. Firstly, as the cabinet memoranda refers to, this is the government making good on their word to that of the Sultan, and to ensure his friendliness. Secondly, the more markedly military objective in

[5] J.E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy,*
[6] See John C. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia: A Study of the Aflāj of Oman*. (Oxford, 1977) p. 121 that further talks of the tradition of water sharing in Oman and these fascinating systems of Irrigation.
[7] Report on works done and recommendations, no 5/59 for Period 22nd May–21st June 1959, dated 30th June 1959, FO 1016/681, p. 32.

preventing such an uprising from occurring again in the area. This strategy was originally coined as 'hearts and minds' during the Malaya emergency. While this concept in general seems positive, the British forces who employed this in Malaya, Ireland, and other places were party to horrific acts of violence that throw the credibility of the strategy into question.[8] Nevertheless, despite the history of such intentions in Malaya, the material evidence of reconstruction is prevalent throughout the records of the Foreign Office. In this case, the 'hearts and minds' campaign was more accurately a 'homes and mosques' campaign, as that was the primary consideration for the immediate aftermath of the conflict under Lt. Col. Maxwell.

In terms of the opposition to the British, the 1960s would see the Imamate splinter, and the beginning of the 'Dhofar Rebellion'. So named for the province that it principally took place in, the rebellion would prove to be less of a direct conflict and took the form of an ongoing counterinsurgency that would plague British efforts to aid the Sultanate up until the mid 1970s.[9] This rebellion was characterised by the establishment of the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) as well as the ideological nature of the combatants against the Sultanate and the British. This is the armed group that would be started in 1965 and be described in war office documentation as "Communist Rebels" in the early 1960s.[10] The DLF were set up in 1965 and would be the main agitators in Dhofar, even spilling over into Yemen in the 1970s at times. They would be ideologically and materially supported by the likes of the USSR and Maoist China. They were also materially supported also by Iraq, the remnants of the Imamate who had set up lines of supply from Iraq and Egypt, and others who saw common cause against the British.[11] This will become more evident in documentation as the decade stretches on as the fragmentation and reformation of militant groupings in the documentation becomes more readily apparent.

It is at this point in the 1960s that the archival documents begin to become more detailed in their descriptions of the efforts ongoing by the Foreign Office and the Armed Forces. The documents examined within are entirely taken from the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Energy department, though exceptions have been made in terms of cabinet papers. An interesting palaeographical note is the adoption of some sort of typesetting forward, indicating a material technological advancement that is welcome for the researcher.

[8] Paul Dixon, "'Hearts and Minds'? British counterinsurgency from Malaya to Iraq." in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 353–381 (at pp. 354, 355–356).
[9] J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy,* p. 228.
[10] Document detailing Rebel Organisation in the Gulf, with a particular focus on Oman, dated from 1961–1963, WO 337/10, p. 5.
[11] Ibid., p. 6

The period up until 1973 is examined due to the scope of sources available in the archives. Its important also to note that the majority of those who had served as the residents of the Foreign Office and of the British consuls, there remained notably few. In the documentation, names like Chauncy, Woods-Ballard, and the like start to become far more infrequent. The successive governments of MacMillan, Douglas-Home, and Wilson, all had differing approaches to British colonial security and foreign policy. The ongoing Cold War, and the ideological nature of the rebels in Oman would further cast a pall on the British efforts, as they struggled to understand whether this revolt could lead to a more widespread effort at Arab national unity, communist insurgency, or cross-national terrorism at large.[12] This almost marks a point in the providence of these documents. This marks a noticeable institutionalisation of the departments, where they cease to be specific people with opinions and instead office norms for communication, policy lines, and references. The documentation around the events, policies, people, and places however remains in good condition and is in keeping with previous iterations of the bureaucratic records of the British Government.

[12] Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies,* p. 267.

2. Development, Defence, and Diplomacy.

The end of the Jebel Akhdar wars brings with it the end of the sorties and activities of both the Special Air Services (SAS) of the UK and the Omani based but UK officered Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) on the ground. As previously mentioned, the reconstruction effort was helmed by a Lt. Col. Colin Maxwell in the area surrounding the Jebel Akhdar. His reports contained suggestions, actions that the British Government could take part in to quickly enable the rehabilitation of the Jebel area. Engineers, construction workers, contractors, and experts all were folded into the growing civil development plan of the British Foreign Office with the aid of the Ministry for Overseas Development. As the cabinet paper previously referred to stated, "in civil development, unlike military organisation, there is no 'threat' or target to which the effort can be related."[13] This is an apt description, as while the effort to take the Jebel Akhdar would take four years, the development of Oman was something that they were prepared to go until 1968 to finance and staff. This embarkation was to be as granular as the creation, maintenance, and renewal of roads in Oman. These were particularly important to the British to create and maintain. The reasons for this are not explicitly stated but given the oil company road was among one of the first areas to be surveyed it is not unlikely that it would be for the benefit of them.[14]

The analysis and survey of the interiors construction quality and road surfaces was conducted by a R.W.T. Griffith, an expert in the Middle East Development Division, a subsection of the Ministry of Overseas Development. Griffith's observations ranged from the road excursion to the intimate examination of school's construction methods, and as broad as critiquing the very organisation of the labour in Oman. He critiqued specifically the separation between development done by the military and the development done by the civil organisations being set up by the British in Muscat.[15] The Middle East development division were a significant force in British foreign policy during this time in Oman, and the Trucial States more generally. They were the technical and professional hub for aid provision in the Middle East and were instrumental in the recommendations to the Foreign Office in terms of infrastructural development in Oman. These 'Dev Divs' as they are referred to by a UN Policy coordinator, Krassowski, who has written extensively on the subject, were the main

[13] A cabinet paper drafted by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated July 1960, CAB 129/102/4, p. 83.
[14] Report by R.W.T. Griffith on behalf of the Middle East Development Division, dated 28th December 1960, FO 371/156788 p. 5.
[15] Ibid., p. 21-23.

areas of policy advice for British presence in the Middle East.[16] These divisions were in name aid agencies and ended up working as policy arms of the British, spearheading the so-called "peasants, not pashas" policy.[17] Experts like Griffith were massively important to the British colonial development effort throughout the world. The MEDD were more involved in Baghdad, Amman, and Bushehr. Oman on the periphery of this was still a significant point, but warring ideological forces between paternalistic colonialism and off-hands sudden decolonisation within the foreign office made policymaking on the frontlines difficult. We see this in the MEDD's recommendation for the creation of a public works office vs the foreign office doing more specific projects.

Griffith's recommendations for roadworks, construction changes were materially carried through. Even his bureaucratic recommendations, like the creation of a public works department was seriously considered, though rejected on the grounds that:

> a public works office merely for civil and military redevelopment which appear to be in hand … is not worth setting up but say in two years time it would be worth it.[18]

Within these points we now see the first kernels of worry over the budget and budgetary concerns. Oil was still a few years away from being drilled successfully, and even further from being exported in 1967.[19] The considerations for the British government would certainly have been a limiting of the amount of money they would invest without any 'return' in the form of oil moneys and wealth created. Indicative here is the conservative government's policy and ideology in terms of finance and how it begins to pass over into the Foreign Office. While the British government would continue to pour money into the development of Oman, the significance of their apprehension to invest more given their already large investment is palpable.

In terms of what they are spending on, roads have already been mentioned but there was also a considerable focus on education and the need to retain teachers from other offices in the Foreign Office. By the 1960s there was only 'one school for boys' according to the documentation. The British office then endeavoured to set up a new school, a boarding school

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[16] Andrzej Krassowski, "The Middle East Development Division" in *Public Administration and Development* 14, no. 1 (1975): 4-16 (1).
[17] Paul Kingston, *Britain, and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945–1958* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 10.
[18] British Secretary to the Sultan's views on Griffith's suggestions on the creation of a public works department, dated March 25th, FO 371/156788 p. 37. Note that this comes from Salalah, as after the Jebel Akhdar War, the Sultan mainly keeps to Salalah, presumably to keep a presence in the south against Dhofar.
[19] Mandana E. Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town,* (Stanford, 2010), p. 3.

in Mattrah. Hugh Boustead, who was working Qurayat a small village north of Muscat, at this time laments that he cannot do more, stating that he "feels we have failed badly as I have only built one school for 300 boys in Mattrah."[20] Despite his feeling of failure The British would end up spending close to nearly £30,000 in the endeavour to set up this school in 1961–63.[21] The state of education at this point in the history of Oman was abysmal, and a nationwide public schooling system and authority would not be established until 1968, a year after oil was beginning to be exported.[22]

Religious education and traditional *madrasa* were still common in Oman, so would not be wholly replaced, but the instruction in mathematics and reading was to be adopted through instruction by the British. The Sultan himself was the source for why the school was to adopt a boarding element. Peterson argues that the British intent within this policy would be to begin the 'Omanization' of the standing armed forces in the area.[23] Whether the ulterior motive is to create a base from which to draw so-called 'officer material' is up for debate. The answer for this is likely a culmination of many varied reasons. This fulfils the British commitment to Oman that was expressed in the exchange of letters in 1958, and as a result makes good on a promise to not necessitate further embarrassment internationally. The cynic within would certainly see that having a school set up by the British, taught by British or British-taught teachers would be a 'hearts and minds' campaign in full swing. By the end of 1961, the British government had proposed that the spending in Oman should total £460,184. This is equivalent to £9,045,956.06 today, showing the significance of their concern for the investment into things that would not pay dividends or have a fast rate of return. [24]

Throughout these communiqués we see also something of the character of the Sultan, a man who is so far surly and distrusting of everyone. He had to be convinced to a 'amnesty policy' for the Jebel Akhdar population, the British have commented on how he has an almost "pathological dislike" of debt, and now we see that with Boustead that he is "thoroughly disinterested" in the creation of health centres, schools, and roads.[25] This attitude is also documented in much of the secondary literature surrounding the Sultan. Said was, and

[20] Letter from Hugh Boustead to Robert Walmsley Esq on the pace of development in Oman, dated 13th August 1961, FO 371/156788, p. 70-73.
[21] Letter from B.R. Pridham, to K.H. Jones of the Arabian department on the Funding allocation and creation of a school at Mattrah, dated 30th of May 1961, FO 371/156788 p. 60.
[22] Limbert, *In the Time of oil Piety,* p. 87.
[23] Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies,* p. 178.
[24] Combination of capital and recurrent expenditure within the Long-term development proposals for Oman, Appendix B, FO 371/156788, pp 148-149.
[25] Various documents pertaining to the Sultan of Oman during 1959, 1960, and 1961, FO 371/156788, pp. 19, 23, 110.

remains to a certain extent, a mysterious figure within the documentation. The majority of mentions of him are either in the negative or before asking him to do something. The Sultan would be deposed in 1970 with the help of the British, and their desire to have a separate one was expressed as early as 1959, with a leading British official stating that "he is unpopular both inside and outside the Sultanate; no-one would regret his disappearance."[26] As the cabinet report at the beginning of all this documentation states, that would cause significant "international embarrassment", especially considering the contemporary British feeling of anything East of Suez being predominantly outside of their control. The Sultanate, however, was totally under the control of the British, or more aptly, relied on the British for much of the civil infrastructure and services that a modern state requires. The Sultan had, for much of his rule, ignored most of the needs of the country and had isolated himself in Salalah or Muscat depending on the year. He left the British to do most of the day-to-day governance. The 1960s were very much the end of his reign, and as the decade moved on, so too did the development programme that the Foreign Office take strides to develop Oman. The war office, however, began similar strides and began to track suspicious activities in the area as the DLF began to coalesce in Salalah and resentment against the Sultan grew.

The headquarters of the War Office in Oman were in Sharjah, modern day UAE, but they maintained garrisons all over the Trucial Coast of the time including in Muscat. They would maintain many different assets all over the Trucial Coast and Arabia more generally, not the least of which is an informant who goes by the codename Tiddlywinks. Tiddlywinks, according to the War office documents has been in, out, and around the Imamate's remnants, inside Baghdad with the Imam himself, in Egypt for the opening of the Imamate's offices there, at the UN vote that raises the "question of Oman, and in Dammam at the Imama's residence-in-exile among other places".[27] His accounts are of absolute credibility to the War office and aspersions are almost never cast on his testimony. He reports on the Imam whenever he can, on the growing dissent within the remnants in Dammam as well as the developments in Saudi regarding their relations with the remnants also. He seems to hop from one place to the other, so it is reasonable to assume that he is someone in the confidence or even party to Ghalib, whose life in exile went all over the Arab world looking for credibility in his struggle. One of the largest pieces of information that Tiddlywinks gleans for the British is the culture of arms smuggling within the Sultanate. According to Tiddlywinks there

[26] Quote from Sir George Middleton talking of the Sultan's apprehension to rehabilitate Jebel Akhdar, found in Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies,* p. 190.
[27] Numerous reports documents and filings dating from 1959–1964, WO 337/10.

is a significant amount of gun running being done by government officials from Basra to the armed wing of the Omani Revolutionary Movement called the Oman Rebel Army (ORA).[28] Much of the information that Tiddlywinks gives is based on this group that has formed out of the remnants of elements that were involved in Jebel Akhdar War. The group were based in Dhofar and as such they were tied to the Aden protectorate and their nascent communist and independence movements.[29]

Tiddlywinks was, however, not the only supplier of information to the British administration within the gulf at this time. American intelligence pervaded throughout the area also. The American military mission in Taif, through means unrecorded in documents, forwarded an interesting piece of intelligence to the British on an occasion. British and American rivalry during the cold war in the Middle East is of course well known, encapsulated by the Suez crisis but they were known for sharing information on the grounds of anti-communist sympathies. The most intriguing point, dated 22nd of September 1961, and included in a report by Tiddlywinks, is that the ORA were sending people to be trained in Saudi, and then defecting to Dhofar or, with the tacit agreement of the Saudi's, simply leaving:

> It is extremely difficult to identify ORA Personnel who wear normal Saudi uniforms at all times … an estimate of the number now present in Taif is only 50.[30]

As the war office made up a significant amount of the personnel on the ground for the British, this development held importance for the Foreign Office members who were serving in an administerial capacity. This was in line with the next few years developments in terms of attacks on British personnel, sites, and materiel which became slightly more infrequent. There is an unexpected overlap here between workers of oil companies here. The American military mission in Taif says that the "oil company Workers are ripe pickings for the ORA for personnel."[31] The point here is less that rebellion was fomenting, but more so of the overlap in intelligence between the British and the Americans. There was clearly some working relationship between them, and their goals in common. The security of oil deposits.

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[28] Document pertaining to different regional intelligence pieces, dated 22nd September 1961, WO 337/10, p. 1.
[29] Spencer Mawby, "Britain's last imperial frontier: The Aden protectorates, 1952–59." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no. 2 (2001): 75–100 (80).
[30] Rebel training in Saudi Arabia document, included in regional intelligence reports from Tiddlywinks, dated 22nd September 1961, WO 337/10, p. 3.
[31] Rebel training in Saudi Arabia document, included in regional intelligence reports from Tiddlywinks, dated 22nd September 1961, WO 337/10, p. 5.

The contacts between the British and the Americans are indicative of the necessity for them to communicate given the conditions surrounding security in oil. This communication between differing offices at rivalry extends into the corporate world as well. Shell, whose presence in Oman was largely limited to owning a considerable share in PDO were sent a letter claiming to be from the Imam detailing several points, particular among them that "any and all agreements with the Sultan will not be recognised" and that oil prospecting by anyone "will be considered a part of British aggression."[32] The point, according to Middle Eastern Command (MECOM in British military parlance), was to show that there was among the rebels a "man educated in English" and "familiar with international political phraseology". The attaché who met with the Shell representative, S.M. Black, made a point to say that "we are usually forthcoming with our contacts in Shell." A key point to note as it exemplifies yet again this Petroleum-Political Complex developing in real-time in response to indigenous movements. The report also implicates Mecom oil company (unrelated to British MECOM), who would hold a concession before pulling out in 1967 due to the nascent Dhofari Insurgency.[33]

It is at this point in 1963–64 when the exploratory investigations for oil begin to take on an accelerated character. By the end of 1962, the civil development plan announces that "Petroleum Development (Oman) are more optimistic than at any time previously" to find oil in commercial quantities. These early years of the 1960s saw a marked increase in sabotage of the oil supply and some considerable terrorist activity within Oman. This was aimed at the British positions, companies, and personnel in the area. There were numerous accounts of sabotage in 1963 that targeted "water pumps" and "oil graders."[34] These minor acts of sabotage fitted with the narrative that was accepted by the command of the TOS at the time. Mainly that the Dhofari Rebellion was beginning to sputter out and that serious resistance to any operations was negligible. The rebellion however, had barely gotten off the ground at this stage, but based on documentation it is easy to see that this was the case at the time. There was a renewed interest by the British in courting the Trucial State's rulers (on behalf of British oil companies) at this point in time. This was due to the possibility of oil deposits

[32] Letter on behalf of the Imama (Imam) of the Omanis, dated April 20th, 1963, FO 1016/733, p. 89.
[33] Report on the sighting of Armed individuals by representatives of Mecom oil company, dated April 19th 1963, FO 1016/733, pp. 194–196.
[34] Details on comments about the ongoing Omani revolt in 1963, dated 16th March 1963, 1016/733, pp, 207.

within the disputed territories between the different states (see figure 1 for geographical clarification).[35]

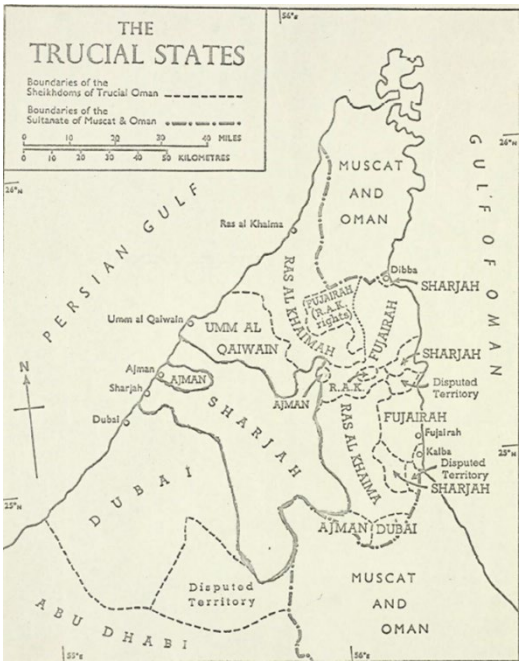

Figure 1: Map of Trucial States, Muscat, and Oman, in 1965

The shared space between the Trucial Coast, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, has been a flashpoint since the Buraimi affair. This was where most of the British Foreign Office work laid in convincing the leaders to agree to being okay with significant exploration going on in disputed territory. The possibility of there being a largescale dispute on breaking out would leave the British in a weakened position and would pit them wholesale against Saudi Arabia and America.[36] The focus was on Um Al-Zamoul, an area that lay in the almost dead centre of the disputed territory. By the end of 1963, the Foreign Office was keen to have someone there who could convince both the Sultan and the Trucial States to cooperate with this and to rendezvous with Iraq, and Abu Dhabi Petroleum Companies respectfully (the latter being owned by the former).[37] This dispute was largely ignored for much of the year as it dragged on. Saudi Arabia had protested drilling sites recently before to do little else other than remind the British government where their concession line was for ARAMCO, essentially bluffing their boundaries by way of US military support.[38] That being said, it is clear from the

[35] A map of the borders of Trucial states, and Muscat and Oman in 1965. Available at https://www.agda.ae/en/catalogue/tna/fo/1016/844/n/66 [accessed 3 May 2023]
[36] A report on the possibility of oil being found around Um Al-Zamoul, dated December 5th, 1963, included in documents dated to 1965, FO 371/168942, p. 318.
[37] Ibid., pp. 319–321.
[38] A report on the possibility of oil being found around Um Al-Zamoul, dated December 5th, 1963, included in documents dated to 1965, FO 371/168942, pp. 318, 329.

communiqués of these that the British were keen not to get involved in a scandal that could hurt their reputation. Rapprochement between the Omani Rebels and the Sultanate was to be the main avenue of work for the Foreign Office at this point. The logic is sound as it would disable the main opposition to the Sultan's legitimacy in the area. The main issue however was not the rebels, it was the Sultan, who had crystallised in his view as to the Rebels. In the minutes of a meeting, the Sultan is quoted as saying "they [the rebels] have the option of turning themselves into the Minister of the Interior of Muscat' and that he would 'not meet them anywhere, Beirut or London."[39]

As previously stated, the intransigence of the Sultan is something that the Foreign Office dealt with constantly over the 1960s. oil, however, continued to be the driver of all interactions between the Sultanate and many representatives for much of this decade. In 1964 there began a new regime of meetings with PDO, which had been majority owned by Shell since 1960.[40] Since the concessionary arrangement had devolved to PDO and the IPC were no longer involved, direct British contact within the company seemed to be limited. Indeed, the previously mentioned meeting between the Shell representative and S.M. Black indicates somewhat of a business relationship. Jan Brouwer, who was chairman of Shell from 1965–70, visited that year to meet with the leaders of the countries whom Shell did most business with. Over the course of this tour, he came to the residence in Bahrain and informed the resident of the need for significant capital investment, £70 million, in Oman before commercial transportation could occur. The resident responded by stating:

> Internal security is now well established, and we believe that it can be maintained by the S.A.F. I particularly emphasised my view that the sooner the Sultan has an assured revenue from oil the quicker and more effectively will he be able to consolidate the security and stability of his country.[41]

The tone alone shows that the British were concerned that the pace of oil investment was going to slow down before investment could be attained. The Sultan's reluctance to entertain anyone to argue with him on oil matters, to renegotiate an issue with the companies or the Foreign Office is also repeatedly brought up. His "preoccupation with security" is referenced throughout the documentation as a reason for his malcontent with all petitioners

[39] Minutes of a meeting between the Political Resident of Bahrain and the Sultanate's senior leadership and Sultan, dated September 11th, 1964, FO 371/174555 p. 19.
[40] Letter from an agent of the Treasury department to the Foreign Office on the current state of the oil industry, oil concessions and Dhofar, dated January 7th, 1964, FO 371/174573 p. 7.
[41] Report of the political resident of Bahrain and his office detailing a meeting with Shell Chairman, Jan Brouwer, dated January 4th, 1964, FO 371/174573, p. 11.

the British included.[42] Regardless of his attitude, the Sultanate was rapidly becoming an attention centre for the British as oil began to be considered in significant quantities. By October 1964 there were significant tensions between the Trucial States Sheikhs, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Muscat over the delineation of oil wells. There had been several events where the Shaikh of a particular state had gone to an oil drilling party and "took them back to a point" where they delineated the border.[43]

What these times and events begin to show us is the relationship between oil companies and the British evolving. No longer is there simply a handful of exploratory men who talk with the Sultan, or head executives calling on him for concessions. Now it is very much the British Foreign Office holding the reins of when, where, and how the exploratory missions may operate based on the negotiations with the Sultan. This year would be marked with the decision by shell to fully invest in Oman as a prospective oil supplier, through PDO. Expectations on their behalf would be 6-7 million tons a year beginning in 1967.[44] The end of the year would be a frustrated affair for both Shell and the British as both would desperately try to convince the Sultan to accept advance payments on the oil to be produced and create a binding agreement with him. The Sultan's pathological fear of debt obviously taking the precedent here is of course the main element of critique to the British and something the Foreign Office would fail to grapple with. Shell, main capital beneficiary would leverage the security situation to the tune of £150,000 in a security contribution to the Sultanate from the early 1960s onwards.[45] The only issue with this, from the Sultan's perspective was that the agreement in kind was to lapse as soon as oil began to be produced and sold.

This ramp up in the mid-1960s was a tumultuous time for the Middle East in general and British Presence was a key factor in the mind of many of the so-called 'anti-imperialist' regimes that would be set up in this time. Syria, Iraq, and Libya would all be founded with the express wishes to create an anti-Western influenced state.[46] The parallels between these states and the Dhofar rebellion are clear, and as the ramp up in tension on the Arab world would reach a fever pitch in the mid 1960s as the Six-Day War inched closer to breaking out. This was due to a significant amount of resistance to all development of British influence

[42] Letter from J.S.R. Duncan to Frank Brenchley, dated March 24th, 1964, FO 371/174573, pp. 30-32.
[43] Telegram from Dubai residency of Political Resident to Foreign Office HQ in Muscat, dated October 8th, 1964, pp. 55–56.
[44] Telegram to Foreign Office detailing shell deciding to go ahead with oil production, confirmed by Shell Executive Mr. Clough, dated 1st November 1964, FO 371/174573, p. 69.
[45] Letter from Sir William Luce to the Foreign Office HQ, dated 14th December 1964, pp. 83–85.
[46] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, 2018), pp. 148–151.

within the area and American influence also, which explicitly included the oil companies that were involved in the exploitation of the resources of these state's geography. The reason the British were keen to keep the Sultanate in power seems obvious given these developments, and prescient as well in the context of the early 1950s.

3. Frustration Ebbs

By the midpoint of the 1960s, the Sultanate was in a period of arrested development. The British civil development plans were being implemented but the pace was far too slow for their liking. Simultaneously, the Foreign Office aimed to prevent the funding of the Civil Development Scheme in perpetuity. They wanted a guarantee that it would be funded only until the Sultanate found oil and began to profit, and not indefinitely if oil was not found.[47] Despite this, the Sultan began to talk and speak of a development plan in November of 1964 that would remain a plan only until 1966, with British secretaries, ministers, and advisors, no Omani in government of any kind. The reason for this is not forthcoming from any source other than the British, who felt that the Sultan, along with debt, had a "pathological fear" of other Arabs, the motive not being fully explained by them in any capacity.[48] The documents paint a bleak picture of Oman at this stage. In the eyes of the British, the state did not have the basic bureaucratic machinery to maintain or organise any large-scale oil operations. However, things overall were optimistic on the half of the British. Luce draws this image at the end of 1964:

> It is quite refreshing to find a monarch in this part of the world who approaches the coming problems of oil wealth in an intelligent and orderly, albeit cautious, manner.[49]

Regardless of this however, the Sultan feared societal development as an element for fomenting rebellion and the ongoing issues in Dhofar certainly signified that. British elements quietly talked among themselves of the authoritarian and backward nature of the Sultan's rule, and his divergent personal difference to the culture of the Omani Islamic adherents. Takriti describes how the Sultan was 'alienated' from other Omanis and that his upbringing in the "shadow of the Raj" influenced his governance significantly.[50] Takriti also further characterises the Sultan's views of Oman as 'colonially conservative' something that the British would undoubtedly agree with. The Sultan's fear of a miasmic development, one that would enable Omanis to look to other Arab states for their future state's blueprints, was palpable in the eyes of the British. Foreign Office policy at this point was stymied by mixed reactions within the office as to whether they should advance development plans on their own

[47] Letters detailing the civil development programme renegotiations with the Sultanate, dated 10th–24th January 1966, pp. 10–27 (11, 15, 20–22).
[48] Letters detailing the administration and employment of British Subjects as Sultanate administrators, dated November 10th, 1964, FO 371/174573, pp. 95-96
[49] Letter from William H. Luce to Frank Brenchley, dated November 16th, 1964, FO 371/174573, p. 100.
[50] Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976*, pp. 153-155.

or accede and allow the Sultanate to remain the slave-owning uneducated backwater that the Sultan dictated it to remain. Regardless of the outcome, the oil would flow, that was all the British apparatus was interested in, although the administrators themselves seemed to carry some personal influences over this concern. The DLF, ORA, and all other combatants were by-lines to this policy. The main goal, stated by the political resident in Bahrain throughout the 1960s, on this front was 'the continued rule of the Sultan, whatever his shortcomings in certain directions, is the best.'[51] The ideology behind this tack the Foreign Office takes makes sense given the grander scope of the British influence in Oman. The embarrassment of Jebel Akhdar and the subsequent attention of the UN on matters of state would clearly have put pressure on the Foreign Office to avoid making any major changes to Oman. Consequently, non-intervention in the country might doom the possibility of independent oil supplies or the possibility of creating a situation that would quickly spiral out of control, as Iran would eventually at the end of the 1970s.

By the mid-1960s, the Foreign Office had become the main bureaucratic engine of the Sultanate and had begun to create the apparatus of the state in total terms. Fisheries, hospitals, agricultural departments, as well as transportation were all accounted for in the Foreign Office's documentation, with the round estimate of British investment in Oman coming to between £250,000 and £300,000 for 1966 alone. The split for it was £200,000 in immediate capital with a larger £100,000 subsidy year to year going forward.[52] This subsidy would ramp up to close to £185,000 based on the Foreign Offices estimation, year to year. These estimates were extensive, including accommodations for the vehicles for individual advisors and ministers within the Sultanate, the capital costs for specific school buildings. The accounts are written in rupees, but helpfully the Foreign Office decided to round the numbers in an Annex that put the total amount at the one above. Another point to be made was that the point to be paid by the Sultanate was miniscule in comparison to the round; their share was to be around £6,000.[53] These estimations were to cover until 1969, which it was then hoped would be nullified when oil capital began to exceed, British treasury spending. The primary philosophy remained as it had since the beginning of the new relationship in the 1950s, and remained the creation of a friendly, pro-British country in the Gulf that also had a stable supply of oil separate from Iran. What was a cause for concern for the British however, was

[51] Letters from M.S. Weir detailing the possibility of the Death of the Sultan and succession, dated 14th February 1968 FCO 8/574, p. 63.
[52] Detailed accounts on the development of the Sultanate of Oman and the British Civil development plan for the Sultanate, dated February 13th, 1965, FO 371/179822, pp. 14-18.
[53] Memoranda on the philosophy behind the civil development fund in Muscat and Oman, dated 20th Jan 1965, FO 371/179822, pp. 34–42 (40).

that the Oman ‘question’ ceased to be just the issue of the British, and instead became a wider UN point, one that would be deliberated in a wider global audience not friendly to previous British actions in the Middle East.

4. International Recognition

'The Question of Oman', as it was known, became a major source of legitimacy for the Imamate and Dhofari Liberation front's struggles against the Sultanate and by extension, the British. In 1963, the UN voted to establish an *ad-hoc* committee to investigate, rule on, and deliberate the nature of British influence in Oman.[54] This *ad-hoc* committee would be barred from visiting Oman and would draft several recommendations from 1965–1968, chief among them being the "withdrawal of all British troops" and an "elimination of British domination in any form" within Oman.[55] This came largely at the behest of Arab neighbours persistence that the issue be raised at the UN and be deliberated upon. The Foreign Office, however, saw this as little more than "trouble at the United Nations", nothing substantial to be seriously worth any consideration and attention. If anything, they considered the issue to be more of a way to influence other UN member nations such as Japan.[56] The implications of the creation of the ad-hoc committees are relevant as it showed that as the Dhofari issue became less an internal one for the Sultanate and one that the larger Gulf had to deal with, the question of development, aid and relevant international authorities became one that the British had to deal with. The implications for the influence that Arab countries might have over international organisation and the threat this posed for British policy in the Gulf is felt in the letters of the Middle Eastern Development Division towards the end of the 1960s:

> It seemed to me, however, that either way – formally or informally – the peculiar circumstances of our Treaty Relationships with the States might make it difficult to know how to proceed ... with assistance from the UN.[57]

The increased international attention, however, was something the British clearly did not want nor welcome. This development coincided with several key factors that began to limit the involvement of the British in the gulf area. The first was the Six-Day war and the success of the Israelis in that conflict. The second was the Aden emergency and the subsequent disengagement of all British personnel from Yemen.[58] The latter would be far

[54] UN General Assembly resolutions of the 18th Sitting of the General Assembly on the question of Oman and the formation of an Ad-Hoc committee to investigate, dated 11th December 1963, A/RES/1948(XVIII). Available at https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/18 [accessed 8 May 2023].
[55] UN General Assembly resolution on the recommendation of ad-hoc committee proposal, dated 12 December 1967, A/RES/2302(XXII) (available at https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/22 [accessed 8 May 2023]. The larger details of this recommendation have been repeated since the initial creation of the Ad-hoc committee in 1963.
[56] Foreign Office letters between A.R. Walmsley, and Sir Oscar Morland, envoy to Tokyo, dated January 21st, 1963, FO 371/168694, p. 9.
[57] Letters from P.P. Howell, member of the MEDD and the Ambassador to Beirut, dated March 9th, 1966,
[58] Abdullah Omran Taryam, *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950-85*. (London, 2019 (original 1987)), pp. 61–64.

more influential in the dealings between Oman and the British however, as the DLF would develop a multitudinous approach to the British presence, and in 1968 declare the PFLOAG and begin operating under that moniker, and a more revolutionary Marxist-Leninist character. This declaration would change the movement from one seeking to liberate Dhofar, to a wider movement that partook in the Arab Nationalist movement and especially that movements shift to revolutionary dynamics and anti-imperialist motives.[59] The issues that the PFLOAG brought up in Oman i.e., education, health services, lack of political enfranchisement, were all (from the British perspectives) simply fronts for Marxist Propaganda. This is particularly vexing as the British were simply filling in for the state in most if not all these areas and the Foreign Office themselves were the central nervous system of this institutionalisation. The issue, however, was one of a growing internationalisation of the issue of Oman, a problem that neither the Sultan nor the British wanted to be dragged into defending in the UN.

By the late 1960s little materially had changed in Muscat, frustrating the British. Only by 1966 had he even agreed to start sending people to school and allow schools a broader remit than the British had initially negotiated.[60] The Foreign Office began to seriously consider whether the replacement of the Sultan with his brother or his son was something that they wanted to consider doing. In 1967, there was a reluctant communiqué between the Foreign Office and that of Sayyed Tariq bin Taimur, the brother of the Sultan. British intelligence had it on good authority that the Sultan's brother was touring several neighbouring states looking to get support for his plan, especially amongst the Saudis and Jordanians:

> Tariq was also said to have the support of large numbers of Omanis at present outside the Sultanate including sheikhs Ghalib, Talib and Sulaiman bin Himyar and to hold the keys to arms dumps in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. His plan had been discussed with and approved by King Hussein and King Faisal.[61]

The Foreign Office in this situation were noticeably clear that they in no way wanted to act as intermediary nor as kingmaker for Tariq but were happy to act as a 'post office' as they state in these documents, to prevent further civil unrest. There is also mention of the lack of action on the Dhofari front, as they state that only 'four events' have occurred in the previous four years, showing how little the British rated the Dhofari issue internally during these final years of protection. Their main concern was growing instability in their

[59] Taryam, *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950-85*, pp. 65–70.
[60] Memoranda drafted by DC Carden, Consul-General in Muscat, dated March 10th, 1966, FO 371/185371, pp. 43-45.
[61] Foreign Office to Bahrain Residency telegram, dated January 12th, 1967, FCO 8/568, pp. 8-11.

relationship with the Sultan and the possibility of his renouncement of their friendship. Preserving and stabilising the Sultanate was the primary concern for the British Foreign Office at this stage, specifically so that the oil Companies could begin their work stating that they would prefer PDO not to be in a "Nigeria-Type Situation" where they would have to go from one state to another "for field and terminal".[62] These important discussions and letters mark the first stage of failure for this Sultan and would lay the groundwork for much of the discussion that would continue from 1968 onwards. 1969 began the serious deliberations on the front of whether it was necessary to continue dealing with *this* Sultan, when his son had a much more solid temperament and seen as a legitimate replacement for his father. Not only does this coincide with the ongoing militarisation of Saudi but also the incoming withdrawal of the British from the Gulf in force. This worried much of the Foreign Office as it would fundamentally hamper their ability to principally influence, rather than secondarily influence (through cash and soft power), the Omani territories. This was so much of an issue that the Foreign Office saw it as more pressing than the armed rebels in Dhofar:

> The increasing threat to Dhofar may well not be matched by the threat to the present stability of Oman … the latter is in the long run more important.[63]

Policy in Oman was beginning to lose its British characteristic it seemed, and all the dispatches from the Foreign Office reflect this realisation. The last sigh of policy in Oman was exemplified by the push to recommend the PDO recognise Qaboos, the Son of the Sultan, in the event of his father and put the oil revenues in his hands, as well as to pressure the Sultan to allow continued operation on Masirah and Salalah.[64] These would be some of the final policy decisions the Foreign Office would make in Oman prior to the Coup in 1970 that would place Qaboos as Sultan and see his father sent into exile in London. They are important as this last gasp of Empire is one that would solidify the very nature of British involvement in Oman. The complex and overlapping motivations of political, economic, and prestige, all show within the final few documents of the 1960s. There was clearly a concern for the oil revenue, a concern for political stability, a cold war ideological conflict, and throughout it all that trademark British decision-making that had brought so many countries into the fold. Willingly, or unwillingly, the decline of British primacy in the Gulf was something that Oman was a key point of. That which had so long ago started with the Suez

[62] Letters of Michael Weir, Arabian Department of the Foreign Office, dated February 14th,1968, FCO 8/574, pp. 60–62.
[63] Summary of Bahrain despatch, Dated July 7th,1969, FCO 8/1074, p. 11.
[64] Ibid., p. 12.

crisis was now repeated here, albeit with consequences that would benefit the British and by extension their oil companies.

5. Coup and Extraction

Throughout the decade there is a clear development of British policy in the face of the new 'East of Suez' situation, a time of great change for both the Foreign Office and the British political sphere at large. Oman remained at the centre of this whirlwind, caught in differing cabinet and electoral shifts, developmental ideologies, and globally recognised quasi-colonialism. The shifting relationship of the British political system to the wider oil industry as well as shifting relationships between peoples within these spheres of influence had a tangible and material effect on Oman's development, be it educational, infrastructural, or political. The 1960s marked the beginning of Oman's long walk towards total independence and would be a point of inflection for British primacy in the Gulf Area. Civil development began, was stymied, stopped, or was pushed ahead at the behest of the British administration. The Sultan in turn resisted the intervention into his domain, and continued the regressive nature of his state, his personal rule being empowered or delayed by outside influence in the form of rebel movements or threats of British withdrawal.

On the 23rd of July 1970 Said bin Taimur, Sultan of Muscat and Oman was removed from the office of Sultan by his son, Qaboos bin Said Al Said. He was aided by the British every step of the way, who had hidden their desires to replace the Sultan successfully up until the unsealing of records two years ago. By now however, the role the British played in deposing Said was well known. These documents show the dab hand the Foreign Office played in creating, fomenting, and setting the field for the development of oil companies to successfully exploit the resource of Oman, and kept it friendly in British Eyes. The 1970s would prove to be a year of much change for Oman, and the new Sultan, Qaboos, was far more modern than his father ever was. The development of the country was credited to the development of oil revenues in the eyes of the British and remained so for the remainder of their adjunct relationship in Oman for many years. Qaboos would begin to expand that initial development plan put down by the Foreign Office and the MEDD, and by 1980 he would have over 350 schools built, much of the country electrified, and the Dhofari rebellion squashed.[65] Qaboos was by all accounts what the British had hoped for in a successor to the previous Sultan. Within two years, the Sultanate had applied for and gained membership in both the Arab League and the United Nations, signifying the beginning of a new era for the country.[66]

[65] Lambert, *In the Time of oil*, pp. 3–8, (4,6,7).
[66] Letter from the Mr Joseph Godber to Mr. Edwards, MP, dated December 16th, 1971, FCO 8/1681, p. 5.

Conclusion

The Sultanate of Oman has seen profound change in the past century. Today, the Omani say that they are "running" to create their infrastructure – a phrase that signifies their understanding of the limitations of oil wealth.[1] This infrastructure's beginning was clearly propelled and legitimised by the British. Their intent was to create a state in the Arabian Peninsula that would provide an alternative to Iranian oil, promote British prestige in the Gulf, and act as a lynchpin of British foreign policy. British policy here typifies the mindset that the Foreign Office had at the nadir of the British Empire. The 1970s brought great change in the society of Oman, as prosperity brought new development to the country. The British imperial project here had been successful – to a point. This project would allow Oman to develop in ways that the other Arab states would criticise as western, raising the level of education, state stability, and creating a relatively low level of corruption and political strife. With the coup of 1970, the British had managed to successfully help build a nation with very close ties to London, a strategically placed oil reserve, and a willingness to aid British aims in the region. Throughout the Reign of Said bin Taimur, much of the state had stagnated, and resentment for the Sultan had grown considerably among the populace. His personal rule and ineffectual handling of several crises including the Dhofar War, and the Jebel Akhdar rebellion would have been the undoing of him if it were not for the British Foreign Office. The saturation of Foreign Office officials, oil company individuals, and other British officials in the Sultan's advisory, armed forces, and throughout the Omani national project all show the level of investment that Britain had in the state.

Consistent involvement in the creation of the Omani state by the British is visible from the earliest points of Said bin Timur's reign in the 1930s, to the 1970s where they helped to build much of the infrastructure that the state uses. Educational institutions, hospitals, roads, military bases and even the administration to create this all were beholden to British desires. Oil concerns, companies, and concessionary entities all contributed to this under the prospect of striking a well that would prove to be profitable enough to justify this investment. British military engineers, civil development engineers, and the partnerships between both in the 1950s show that this was a partnership that evolved in a direction not always palatable to the British. The development in total, was dependant on the political ideologies of cabinets, foreign ministers, and governmental institutions as well as the

[1] Mandana Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory, and Social Life in an Omani Town* (Stanford, 2010), p. 8.

situation in international relations. Fluctuations such as the Suez Crisis, ongoing decolonial movements, communist rebellions, and pan-Arab movements all had a profound impact on the development of policy in Oman. The creation of an independently oil wealthy nation, with little or no ties to other national interests, on the periphery of international conflicts, in the Gulf area was the overriding desire and aim of the British. Oman was a clear lynchpin for this economic, military, and international security perspective. Documents from the National Archives show that this desire was implemented from the top down, from cabinet, to Political Resident to political agent, all with the intent of promoting oil interests in the region. oil, in British policy was of utmost concern, but to get the oil, the creation of a friendly nation with the apparatus necessary to export large quantities and organise British security was necessary to create.

Few other studies have looked at Oman in as much detail, the minutiae of the British administration in the Gulf being of prime consideration for this research. Most studies focus on the grander implication of the Omani situation for the wider British empire in a military sense, or in a broader survey works that talk of Oman in longer periods or in a wider geographical context as part of the Arabian Peninsula. Almost no works exist that discuss the diplomatic minutiae and the imperial expression within Oman to the degree necessary to understand the development of a state that the British desired for. This, however, does leave quite a significant gap for the British involvement in other such countries, and leaves a great deal of research to be done not only in Oman but also in other countries in the Middle East that the British were involved in. These expressions of British Imperial power are vital, as the development of policymaking has been examined primarily through actions taken, not the bureaucratic apparatus constructed to support these decisions. Future research could point to the development of communication channels, Archival pieces, and even the language used in these letters as a relevant facet of British imperial expression.

Oman has been a country on the brink: the brink of civil war, the brink of modernity, the brink of the Gulf. The British had a significant influence on the development of Oman, for good and for ill, they propped up a despot and intervened in conflicts that helped keep that despot in power. They created situations where the oil industry became the most dominant force in relations between the British and Omani state, but they also built roads, hospitals, and schools, leaving a mixed legacy of colonialism. Today, Oman remains dependant on its oil, but it is attempting to diversify. Now that the British have left Oman, but relations stay warm, the Omani can dictate their own development rather than have it dictated to them.

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