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CHAPTER 2: POWER AND EMPIRE IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

For most of the lifespan of the British Empire, the Arabian Peninsula was only of peripheral imperial interest. Despite the steady tightening of British control over the centuries, the Gulf and Peninsula had never been a principal objective but a means to an end, viz. securing the approaches to India. But several decades into the present century, this was changing. In the words of Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, "There are two main material factors in the revolutionary change that has come over the strategical face of Asia. One is air power, the other is oil."¹ The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Gulf has been the more important and permanent factor catapulting the region into global attention, but the necessities of air communications and air power were first responsible for British concern with the security of the Arabian Peninsula itself. Not long after the technology of air power had been developed, it was applied to Arabia. It was to remain a principal British tool for providing both internal and external security until final withdrawal in 1971.

THE FIRST AIR ROUTES: PERSIAN GULF AND BASRA-ADEN

Origins of the Use of Airplanes in Arabia

Aircraft made their first appearance in Arabia early on in the air age and were employed during World War I. RNAS (Royal Navy Air Services) aircraft were used in 1916 to bomb Ottoman forces besieging Aden and a year later, planes of the Royal Flying Corps were used for artillery spotting along the Tihama coast of the Red Sea.² Other RNAS seaplanes and a French squadron were used for reconnaissance at Jidda and German aircraft apparently flew over parts of Arabia as well, providing assistance to their Ottoman allies. In Mesopotamia, British aircraft dropped supplies

¹Address to the Royal Central Asian Society, June 1949; cited in Olaf Caroe, *The Wells of Power: The Oil-Fields of South-Western Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 184.

²Eric Macro, *Yemen and the Western World Since 1571* (London: C. Hurst, 1968), pp. 43-46. The Royal Air Force was formed in 1918 by the merger of the RNAS with the Royal Flying Corps.

in early 1916 to forces besieged at al-Kut and later attacked retreating Ottoman troops. In Palestine, British and German planes engaged in aerial warfare in support of their respective allies.

Arabian rulers acquired their first aircraft in the mid-1920s, although the effectiveness of these purchases for military use was extremely limited by the unsuitability of the particular airplanes, the lack of skilled pilots (all of whom were Europeans), inadequate supplies, and haphazard maintenance. Britain, the principal European power in and around the Arabian Peninsula at that date, was reluctant to provide air capability to local leaders. Nevertheless, it was prompted to do so on several occasions for fear of being outflanked by European rivals eager to make inroads on the privileged British position.

The willingness of other European states to supply aircraft was demonstrated in Yemen when the Italians landed the first airplane in San'a' to celebrate the signing of the Italo-Yemeni treaty in 1926.³ Shortly afterward, Imam Yahya received six airplanes as a gift from the Italian government and fuel and parts for them were landed at al-Hudayda under the supervision of two Italian destroyers.⁴ To forestall similar inroads with Ibn Sa'ud, the British provided the Saudi ruler with a pilot and two mechanics for the aircraft he had acquired as a result of his conquest of the Hijaz. They declined, however, his request for additional assistance to repel an expected attack by Imam Yahya.⁵

Four years later, the British sold four de Havilland biplanes, accompanied by British pilots and maintenance crews, to Ibn Sa'ud for use against the rebellious Ikhwan, and a base was established for them at Darin on the shore of the Gulf.⁶ These aircraft were a major addition to what was still known as the Hijaz Air Force. Even by 1930, the force was capable only of several long flights and was troubled by lackadaisical attitudes, particularly among the seconded British pilots, and improper maintenance.⁷ One outcome of British reluctance to supply Ibn Sa'ud with the aircraft and personnel he desired was the gift of six Italian planes in 1937.⁸

Despite the Hijazi legacy and Ibn Sa'ud's obvious interest in the advantages of air power, his capabilities in this field were sorely constrained by problems in personnel and an empty treasury. An RAF officer visiting Jidda in 1937 reported that he saw three Saudi pilots, one White Russian pilot (who appeared to be the only skilled aviator), and two Russian mechanics. In addition there was an Italian colonel who was in administrative control of the air force. The aircraft consisted of three 3-engined Capronis for passenger service, two smaller Capronis, a Bellanca formerly owned

³Ibid., p. 64.

⁴AIR/5/433, "Note by Mr. Webster on Policy re Native Aviation in Arabia." 24 May 1926.

⁵Ibid.

⁶David Holden and Richard Johns, *The House of Saud* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 104; FO/371/13727, various correspondence.

⁷FO/371/14454, E5479/2/91, Air Vice Marshal R. Brooke-Popham, Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Iraq Command, to the Secretary of State for Air, 23 Sept. 1930.

⁸FO/371/20840, various correspondence.

by an American gold-mining company, a French Caudron Renard passenger craft, and four ancient Wapitis handed over from the RAF in Iraq – the only planes remotely usable for service purposes.⁹ Nevertheless, Ibn Sa‘ud was far ahead of his fellow Arabian rulers in utilization of the skies.

The Persian Gulf Route

A more substantial impact of the air age on Arabia resulted from the establishment of British air routes around the fringes of the Peninsula. The value of air routes linking the various parts of the British empire had been recognized from an early date. The Civil Aerial Transport Committee, established in 1917, urged the establishment of such routes and emphasized that a strong civil aviation service would provide a basis for rapid military expansion in time of necessity. In 1923, several existing airlines were merged to form Imperial Airways, which was provided a government subsidy in return for the understanding that its aircraft would be at the disposal of the imperial government in time of war.¹⁰

Establishment of a London-to-India air service had been proposed as early as 1912 but rejected as commercially unfeasible. Nevertheless, the cost of subsidizing the overland mail route kept interest alive. By the end of World War I, the route between Cairo and Delhi had been traversed by air for the first time and the Air Ministry put forward a proposal in 1919 for an air service between Cairo and Karachi, noting the benefit it would provide for both military purposes and in carrying mail. The next step was the authorization given to the RAF at the Cairo Conference of 1921 for opening air service between Cairo and Baghdad. Inaugurated on 23 June 1921, this service cut the time for mails between London and Baghdad from 28 to 9 days. Passenger service between Cairo and Basra, via Gaza, Rutba Wells, and Baghdad, was begun by Imperial Airways on 1 January 1927. The remainder of the route to India, however, was to give far more problems, particularly since not all the overflight territory fell within British control, unlike the Cairo/Basra sector.¹¹

The Cairo-Karachi route was seen as the most important link in the imperial air network: in Winston Churchill's 1919 observation, it buckled the empire together.¹² In theory, there existed four alternative routes between Cairo and India: (1) along the Red Sea to Aden and then along southern Arabia to the Makran coast; (2) across the desert to Iraq and then along the Persian coast to Karachi; (3) from Iraq across central Persia to Quetta; and (4) from Iraq along the Arabian coast to Oman and

⁹FO/371/20841, E4627/244/25, Squadron Leader Jope-Slade, Air Ministry, to George Rendel, Foreign Office, 6 Aug. 1937, enclosing report by Squadron Leader Hindle-James.

¹⁰D.H. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography* (10th ed.; London: Sifton Praed, 1950), pp. 178-179.

¹¹Discussion of the early stages of the Cairo-Karachi route relies on L/P&S/18/B414, Air Ministry, "Air Communication in the Persian Gulf," 23 Aug. 1928; H. Burchall, "The Air Route to India," *The Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* (JRCAS), Vol. 14, Pt. 1 (1927), pp. 3-18; Robin Higham, *Britain's Imperial Air Routes, 1918-1939* (London: G.T. Foulis, 1960), pp. 108-133; John Marlowe, *The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century* (London: The Cresset Press, 1962), p. 249-251; and AIR/19/131, R/15/2/263, R/15/6/108.

¹²Higham, *Britain's Imperial Air Routes*, p. 111.

then across to Makran. The Red Sea/southern Arabia route suffered from its far greater distance, lack of suitable facilities, and seasonal disruptions by the monsoon. The inland Persian route also contained operational disadvantages as well as political ones.

From an operational or technical point of view, the two coastal alternatives in the Gulf were evenly balanced. The distances were comparable, the climates similar, and they offered equal access to supply by sea. The Persian coast held a slight advantage, however, because of the existence of the Indo-European Telegraph Department's lines along the same stretch and because of presumed political and security obstacles involved in dealing with the various shaykhdoms. The Arabian route suffered from the additional disadvantage of the necessity of bridging the wide gap between a stop on the Trucial Coast and the Makran coast – a new generation of aircraft capable of safely flying this distance came into service only in 1932.

As a consequence, the choice was made to fly along the Persian coast. But serious obstacles surrounded this decision from beginning to end. The prickly question of air rights formed only one aspect of a much larger panoply of Anglo-Persian disputes. British representatives had sounded out Tehran on the possibility of traversing Persia as early as 1924 with little success. Agreement on a fortnightly service was provisionally reached in September 1925 with Reza Khan, then Prime Minister and later Shah, but it became a dead issue after the Majlis (Parliament) refused to ratify it. One difficulty for the British lay with the presence of the German Junkers service, which had begun flying from Berlin to Tehran via Russia in 1924.¹³ Another was the ascendancy of Soviet influence at the Persian court and British disfavor because of the use of Persia as a base to back the White Russians. A third area of disagreement concerned the siting of the route, with Tehran insisting on its crossing central Persia and Imperial Airways desiring the more southerly route along the Gulf coast.

Despite a protracted second round of negotiations in 1927, it became clear that the Persian government would never adhere to original agreement. Finally, compromise was reached in mid-1928 on a limited service along the coast, using only Bushire and Jask as aerodromes, for a period of no more than three years, at the end of which service was to be rerouted through central Persia. The final leg of the Cairo-Karachi service, via Persia, was inaugurated on 5 April 1929 and continued on a regular basis until October 1932 when the route was transferred to the Arab littoral. The fact that Tehran had provided Imperial Airways with details of the central route only months before expiration of the agreement, combined with the company's conclusion that it presented too many natural obstacles, led to a temporary extension of the Persian coast agreement until the Arabian littoral route could be surveyed and developed.¹⁴

¹³Marlowe, *Persian Gulf*, p. 249.

¹⁴It seems surprising, given the political difficulties involved in the Persian route, that no consideration was given by either the Air Ministry or Imperial Airways to an Arabian alternative until forced to do so in 1931. A subsequent internal Foreign Office discussion concluded that transfer of the route had been the right decision politically even though the two shores were evenly balanced on technical grounds. As Assistant Undersecretary of State Sir L. Oliphant put it, "...we moved to the Arab coast of the Persian Gulf, not just because the Persians didn't like our flights, but in order to be independent of Persian goodwill." FO/371/17894, E5648/139/34, comments of 3 Mar. 1935, on draft memorandum, "Anglo-Persian Relations."

The goal for the Arabian route was to have main refuelling stations at 200-mile intervals, and emergency landing grounds laid out every 30 to 50 miles.¹⁵ Service along the route was expected to be provided by flying boats, particularly since the RAF had long used them for operations in the area. The work of surveying the route and making political arrangements for the establishment of facilities went hand-in-hand. The job of surveying fell to the RAF's No. 203 (Flying Boat) Squadron, which had carried out its duties at an earlier date as part of the development of the RAF's Basra-Aden route.¹⁶ No. 203 Squadron began work in April 1929 and had finished its task within a few months, except for the thorny problem of facilities in the vicinity of the Ru'us al-Jibal, the mountainous spine jutting up into the Strait of Homuz.

Meanwhile, the PRPG was engaged in negotiations with the various rulers from Kuwait to Muscat. The selection of Kuwait and Bahrain was not surprising since both locations offered excellent facilities, their rulers were cooperative and existing landing grounds already had been used occasionally by the RAF. Muscat was also advantageous from the political point of view but was too far off the direct route from Iraq to India and offered poor conditions for flying boats. Consequently, the search for more suitable facilities moved to the Trucial Coast.

Not unexpectedly, the Trucial Coast posed political problems. Apart from a Native Agent, the British had never permanently stationed a representative there and involvement in internal affairs had been negligible. In addition to forming the most isolated region in the Gulf, its people were seen as the most resistant to outside intrusions. A 1927 RAF expedition from Oman's Batina Coast encountered considerable hostility in its survey of the Trucial Coast, a factor that helped shift the balance toward the Persian route.¹⁷

But when it became necessary to map out the Arab route, the RAF determined that Ra's al-Khayma offered the best facilities, as well as being the closest point to the Makran. But Ra's al-Khayma's ruler, despite the considerable pressure of the Resident, remained unyielding in his refusal to allow use of his creek by a civil air service, let alone the building of a resthouse. Negotiations with Dubai began on a more promising note but eventually the *shaykh* admitted that he could not get the assent of his relatives.¹⁸ Only in 1937 did the establishment of Imperial Airways' flying-boat

¹⁵In addition to Higham, *Britain's Imperial Air Routes*, and Marlowe, *The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century*, the following discussion of the Arabian littoral route relies on H. Burchall, "The Political Aspect of Commercial Air Routes," *JRCAS*, Vol. 20, Pt. 1 (1933), pp. 70-90; G.W. Bentley, "The Development of the Air Route in the Persian Gulf," *JRCAS*, Vol. 20, Pt. 2 (1933), pp. 173-189; Muhammad Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), pp. 48-57; Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 92-106; and AIR/5/1216-1218.

¹⁶Bentley, "Development of the Air Route," details the squadron's work as including selecting sites for landing grounds and flying-boat anchorages, marking out landing grounds, laying moorings, installing tanks or other refuelling arrangements, arranging resthouses, and erecting W/T stations.

¹⁷Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates*, pp. 49-51.

¹⁸In early 1932, Yas Island (off the coast of Abu Dhabi) was proposed as an alternative night-stop for flying-boat service, apparently because it was technically suitable and did not seem to raise political questions. Although fuel tanks were installed for emergency use, Yas was never seriously considered as a main stop.

route include Dubai as a night-stop (although the passengers had to travel overland to the existing resthouse in Sharjah).¹⁹

As it gradually became clear that a suitable flying-boat base could not be secured, the decision was made to utilize landplanes. Sharjah, though unsuitable as an anchorage, was perfectly acceptable as the site of a landing ground. While apprehensive, the *shaykh* of Sharjah was eventually induced to grant his permission, his approval undoubtedly aided by the residence of the Native Agent there, the promise of a subsidy, and the decision to switch the port-of-call for British India steamships from Dubai to Sharjah.

With Sharjah's selection, the Arabian coastal route was complete. Necessary links for its operation had been set up at Kuwait, Bahrain, Sharjah and then Gwadar on India's Makran coast.²⁰ There still remained minor problems of acquiring additional landing grounds (especially on the opposite side of the Ru'us al-Jibal from Sharjah, because of the great distance of the Sharjah-Gwadar hop) for emergency use, but these did not present serious obstacles. Despite the haste in which the route was mapped out, it was ready for use by the end of the last extension of permission for the Persian coastal route. Accordingly service switched to the Arabian littoral in late 1932.²¹

The Basra-Aden Route

The foundations of the Basra-Aden route predate the establishment of the Gulf route in some sectors. Yet the completion of the Basra-Aden route and inauguration of regular service along it occurred later than the Gulf route. The explanation for this seeming anomaly lies in the different purposes for the two routes. The Gulf route arose from the desire to institute civil air service along a key imperial route as soon as possible while the course from Basra to Aden was important only for occasional RAF use and to provide linkage between several RAF stations. Given the RAF's early presence in the region, it is not surprising that some landing grounds were marked out and some permanent stores established at various points between Iraq and Aden prior to the inauguration of Imperial Airways service to India.

The Royal Flying Corps made its first appearance in Mesopotamia in 1916 and the RAF assumed administrative control of the Iraq mandate in October 1922. Even before that date, however, British planes had seen service in military operations in southwest Persia and a series of rudimentary landing grounds had been marked out along the northern shore of the Gulf from

AIR/5/1216, "The Air Route Along the Arabian Shore of the Persian Gulf," 3 Aug. 1930.

¹⁹Zahlan, *Origins of the United Arab Emirates*, pp. 104-105. Other stops on the flying-boat route were Alexandria, Lake Galilee, Baghdad, Basra, Bahrain and Gwadar.

²⁰Although Gwadar was not a part of British India, it was politically suitable since it was a possession of the Muscat ruler.

²¹The usefulness of the new service was extolled in an article in *The Times*, 13 Sept. 1933, entitled "By Air Mail to India: The Arabian Coast Route."

Baghdad to the Indian frontier. In addition, stores of petrol and oil had been laid down in every place where a political officer was maintained.²² Thus, occasional flights were made throughout the 1920s to various locations along the Arabian littoral, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Muscat, and especially Bushire, seat of the residency. Furthermore, an RAF flight had been assigned temporarily to Kuwait, to provide protection against an anticipated attack of the Ikhwan.

At the other end of the route, Aden had witnessed an equally long record of British activities in the air. Aircraft from vessels momentarily passing through Aden had been used on various occasions during the war against Ottoman forces besieging Aden. As early as 1919, air sorties were carried out against recalcitrant tribes of the interior, as well as against the Yemen imamate and Somaliland, and a flight was stationed permanently at Aden in 1920. When overall responsibility for the defense of the colony and protectorate was given over to the RAF in 1928, a squadron of bombers from Iraq replaced the existing garrison of British and Indian troops.²³

The importance of developing air routes along both sides of the Gulf, i.e., the civil route along the Persian shore and the strategic route along the Arabian littoral, was noted in the 1928 Interim Report of the Persian Gulf Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Given the uncertain diplomatic situation in Persia at the time, the report stressed that every possible effort should be made on the Arabian side to prepare for the air route's development, including securing the necessary aerodromes and other facilities.²⁴ The increasing importance of Aden to the RAF undoubtedly made the need for a permanent air linkage between the Aden and Iraq commands that much more obvious.

In early 1929, political arrangements and surveying got underway for the facilities along the Arabian littoral as part of the imperial (civil) air route alternative to Persia. At the same time, the Air Ministry directed the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Aden to extend the chain of landing grounds eastward to the protectorate border. As British control was relatively secure along the coast of the protectorate, this directive posed few problems of a political or security nature. Consequently, work soon started on facilities at Ahwar, Balhaf, Mukalla and Qishn. The principal problem along the full route came from the expanse of Omani territory between Salala and Muscat. The desert coast was especially wild, even by Arabian standards, and the nominal authority of the sultan could not necessarily be relied upon.²⁵

Because of these severe problems, completion of arrangements along the southern Arabian coast were protracted throughout most of the 1930s. Once surveying had been completed and likely sites identified, an even greater difficulty arose in dealing with the *shaykhs* of the largely bedouin tribes, in whose territories the landing grounds were contemplated. An important first step involved convincing the *shaykhs* of their responsibility for protecting the facilities. A sort of carrot-and-stick

²²L/P&S/18/B320, A.T. Wilson, "The Use of Aeroplanes in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf," Apr. 1919.

²³R.J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975), pp. 281-282.

²⁴AIR/8/99, CID, Persian Gulf-Subcommittee, Interim Report, No. 169-D, Oct. 1928.

²⁵Details of reconnaissance and preliminary arrangements along this section of the route are contained in R/15/6/86.

approach was employed. On the positive side, the *shaykhs* were promised payment of a subsidy for guards for the strips and local labor was to be engaged for the construction. On the other hand, the *shaykhs* were warned of the punishment that would be forthcoming from the sultan and/or the British if the facilities were disturbed. It took several years of semi-annual visits for the political agent in Muscat finally to track down the responsible *shaykh* for just the principal tribe on Masira Island. The later selection of a site at Shuwaymiya (in nearby Sawqara Bay), for use as an emergency landing ground, involved the considerable problem of conclusively determining in which tribe's territory the site was actually situated.²⁶

In 1932, the work of actually constructing facilities was kicked off by the meeting of the AOCs of Aden and Iraq at a mid-point of the route in Oman. By the end of the year, a landing ground had been laid out and an oil depot established on Masira. A complete survey of the route was carried out during November 1933 by No. 203 (Flying Boat) Squadron, making intermediate stops at Bahrain, Ra's al-Khayma, Khawr Jarama (Ra's al-Hadd), Mirbat, and Mukalla.²⁷ In 1934, a landing ground was laid out at Khawr Gharim (in Sawqara Bay) and the sultan of Oman built a petrol store for the RAF at Salala. A second site in Sawqara Bay was reconnoitred several times and a landing ground laid out in 1936 with a petrol dump added in 1938. By 1936, the route was finally complete and the first scheduled flight carried out.²⁸

The completion of the two air routes meant that the various stations along the periphery of the Peninsula were no longer so physically isolated and dependent on time-consuming travel by sea. As R.J. Gavin has explained,

This represented a further development in the logic of the new air strategy for now Aden could be rapidly reinforced from the Royal Air Force's principal bases in the Middle East and was linked in with the other recently established imperial air routes reaching on to India and the East. The whole shape of imperial defence was changing. Air routes were replacing sea routes as defensive arteries, along which military units could be shuttled back and forth, especially in the Middle East where the Air Force was in control, and the security of landing grounds and airfields was coming to equal in importance the protection of naval bases and harbours.²⁹

Political Impact of the Routes

²⁶R/15/6/88 and R/15/6/89, various correspondence.

²⁷AIR/5/1269, "Report on the Cruise of Two Flying Boats, No. 203 (F.B.) Squadron, Basra to Aden and Return" (1933).

²⁸Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, p. 282. The burst of activity surrounding the decision to establish the route seems to have inspired some Hadrami financiers to contemplate the development of a commercial air route to link Tarim, Mukalla, and Aden. The sultan of Oman, upon hearing of these plans, suggested the route be extended to Salala. R/15/6/86, Bernard Reilly, Governor of Aden, to G.P. Murphy, Political Agent at Muscat, 5 Apr. 1929. Nothing came of the scheme.

²⁹Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, p. 283.

The air routes marked a significant change in British policy in the Gulf. Gone were the days when British concern was limited to suppression of maritime warfare. Later had come recognition of rulers and then at the turn of the century, assumption of formal responsibility for the minor rulers' external affairs. But until the air routes, Britain still maintained a disinterested, "hands-off" attitude toward much of the Arab littoral, except when disruptions spilled across local boundaries. The establishment of the air routes, with their requirements for facilities, resthouses, and wireless stations, prompted a deepening, direct, British involvement in internal affairs.

This change affected Kuwait and Bahrain least, where landing grounds and resthouses were readily purchased. Both shaykhdoms were commercial centers, with extensive contacts with the outside. Political Agents had resided there for decades, the ruling families had long cooperated with the British, and there had been previous contact with the RAF, which had stationed officers in the shaykhdoms only a few years before in connection with the Ikhwan threats.

Muscat, as well, was not greatly affected by the new direction in policy. There had been a strong British role in the politics of Muscat since the 1890s. The sultanate's Batina coast (on the Gulf of Oman) was under secure control, as well as the Gulf of Oman coast east from Muscat to Ra's al-Hadd. The quasi-independence of the interior was unimportant, since the air routes followed the coast and the interior could not threaten the sultanate after the early 1920s. The section along the coast of the Arabian Sea, however, was a different matter, and it was a lengthy process to track down the leaders of the bedouin tribes and extend the effective control of the Muscat government to the desert stretch of coast.

The greatest impact was along the Trucial Coast, and, to a lesser degree, in Qatar. Treaty relations with the Al Thani of Doha were not established until 1916 and the first permanent British representative did not take up residence in Qatar until 1949. In the Trucial Coast, the hostility to British interference present in the late 1920s, largely as a result of Wahhabi influence and the example of Ikhwan activities, lessened somewhat in succeeding years. Nevertheless, considerable pressure was necessary to gain cooperation of the *shaykhs* in the air routes and, apart from a few aerodromes and ancillary facilities, the coast's isolation remained near complete until well after World War II.

The importance of the establishment of air routes in extending British influence and concern over local, domestic, affairs should not be underestimated, particularly given the strategic importance of these routes during the war. Nevertheless, the enduring reason for deepening British involvement was oil, bringing in its wake Political Agents in Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, oil crews, and a myriad of boundary disputes. Along the Arab littoral of the Gulf, the preparations and consequences of the air routes provided an essential bridge.

POLICING AND AIR OPERATIONS

Air Control and the RAF

The impact of the air age on Arabia was not limited to the establishment of civil and military routes. World War I had served as a testing ground for various new applications of military

technology, among which was the use of aircraft in warfare. In the immediate postwar period, the manifold advantages of air power were extolled by its proponents in enthusiastic manner. The arguments took many forms but the rapid mobility of air forces and their capability to strike heavy blows with virtual surprise seemed to give air power a particularly useful role in imperial defense.

The perceived value of aircraft in fighting "small wars" derived from a number of factors. They exhibited an obvious advantage in reconnaissance, both in the ability to quickly and safely map unknown countryside and in gathering intelligence on enemy movements. Their mobility could be particularly useful in theatres of operation involving relatively small forces spread out over extensive territory. Attack by air was seen as particularly effective where the countryside was rugged and ground movements restricted to a limited number of roads and passes. Aircraft could be used for dropping communications and even some supplies to besieged positions. Finally, artillery spotting could be done more efficiently from the air.³⁰

The use of aircraft to support political authorities in maintaining order seemed to be an application of air power that was even more appropriate for "peacetime" conditions in many areas of the newly expanded empire. In particular, the advantages of air power over ground forces in "punitive expeditions" were seen to include the ability to: (1) strike a quick blow at a great distance; (2) keep forces concentrated without sacrificing mobility; (3) destroy the morale of tribesmen unable to counter air attacks; and (4) speed up negotiations with rebellious tribes by dropping government terms and landing negotiating officials.³¹

Both Spanish and Italian aircraft had been employed in North Africa before World War I, but the first British use of air power in colonial policing occurred along the North-West Frontier and in Afghanistan during 1918-1920. The attack by one bomber on Kabul in May 1920 was seen as an important factor in the decision to sue for peace.³² Aircraft were used to even greater effect in Somaliland in early 1920, when the forces of Muhammad bin 'Abdullah (the "Mad Mullah") were routed by a single bomber squadron in only three weeks. Even more impressive from the British government's point-of-view was the fact that the total cost of the operation amounted to only £77,000.³³

The advantages of air policing appealed to a war-weary government strapped for funds. Even as demobilization of the armed forces proceeded, HMG faced the need for increased expenses and sizable numbers of troops to control new additions to the empire. A rebellion in Iraq during the

³⁰A.E. Borton, "The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* (JRUSI), Vol. 65, No. 458 (May 1920), pp. 310-319.

³¹John Bagot Glubb, "Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions," *JRUSI*, Vol. 71, No. 484 (Nov. 1926), pp. 777-784. The author cautioned that there were certain disadvantages to the air weapon, such as the inability to inflict heavy damages in wooded or mountainous country or against nomadic peoples, the difficulty in identifying the enemy, and the inability of aircraft to force dedicated or disciplined enemies to surrender.

³²Borton, "Small Wars," p. 314.

³³H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 90-91. See also Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

summer of 1920 clearly illustrated the problem: nearly three divisions of British troops were required to put it down and a large permanent garrison force in Iraq appeared necessary.

The case for utilization of air power in imperial possessions was forcefully put forward by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff. Trenchard, the first general officer to command the Royal Flying Corps, had presided over the birth of the RAF, resulting from the merger of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Navy Air Services in 1918, and justifiably was regarded as "the father of the RAF." Trenchard was kept busy during the first few years of the RAF's existence fighting off the Admiralty and the Army, who were determined to reassert their control over the fledgling air service. He faced particular opposition from Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who had once referred to the RAF as a force "coming from God knows where, dropping its bombs on God knows what, and going off God knows where."³⁴ In his counterattack, Trenchard extolled air power's advantages in mobility and flexibility, to which could be added significant financial savings. The aerial campaign in Somaliland was brandished like a weapon in Whitehall.

The opportunity to prove the RAF's value in the field came in 1921, when Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for Air and Trenchard's superior, gained the additional portfolio of Colonial Secretary. Churchill immediately sought to transfer administration of British territory in the Middle East from the India and Foreign Offices to the new Middle East Department in the Colonial Office. In March 1921, he summoned and presided over a conference in Cairo, to which the Viceroy of India, the Chief of the Air Staff, and the various governors and high commissioners in the region had been invited. Among the decisions taken at Cairo to clarify British policy and administration in the region was the transfer of responsibility for defense of the new state of Iraq from the army to the RAF, over the opposition of Wilson and the civilian and military authorities in Iraq. As a result, 8 RAF squadrons (about one-third of the entire RAF) and a small administrative staff replaced 33 infantry battalions, 6 cavalry regiments, 16 artillery batteries and nearly as many support troops.³⁵ The RAF acquired more than responsibility for a colony, it had gained a reprieve from the executioner.

The RAF in Iraq

Britain faced two fundamental problems in governing its new mandate of Iraq. The first was political and revolved around the question of how to administer and control a diverse population lacking any sense of national unity. At the same time, Iraq posed economic complications. Colonies

³⁴Cited in Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard* (London: Collins, 1962), p. 383. For a personal account of Trenchard and the early years of the Air Ministry and the RAF by the long-serving Secretary of State for Air, see Samuel, Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), *Empire of the Air: The Advent of the Air Age, 1922-1929* (London: Collins, 1957).

³⁵Hyde, *British Air Policy*, pp. 90-95; Boyle, *Trenchard*, pp. 381-383; and Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

(and mandates) were not expected to be a drain on the British Treasury, and the army's bill for Iraq had been more than £32 million in 1920-21.³⁶ In part, the response to the political problem involved establishment of an Arab, largely Sunni, government, with a large contingent of British advisers. At the apex was King Faysal al-Hashimi, from a prominent family of the Hijaz (his father was Sharif of Mecca and later King of Hijaz) and who lately had been driven out of Damascus by the French. "The Iraq Government was in no sense 'popular' or representative: it was almost entirely composed of the Sunni Arab urban communities, who, although more sophisticated and educated than most Shia and Kurds, formed a minority of the total population."³⁷ The other aspect of the political problem involved security. Here Trenchard pressed his argument that the RAF could maintain just as effective security in Iraq as the army but at a fraction of the cost, thus potentially solving the economic difficulty.

British airplanes, as noted earlier, had seen action in Mesopotamia during the war, particularly in reconnaissance and artillery spotting but also in punitive actions. Their continued use after the war was viewed favorably by civil and military authorities on the spot, and A.T. Wilson, as Civil Commissioner, advocated increased reliance on the RAF as early as 1919.³⁸ Since an RAF presence had been maintained in the country since the war, the changeover to RAF control in October 1922 took place smoothly, aided by the fact that the new Air Officer Commanding, Iraq, Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond, had been AOC Iraq during the war and was highly regarded.³⁹ Headquarters remained in Baghdad, with two main stations near Baghdad, an advanced airfield at Mosul in the north, and emergency landing grounds at appropriate locations. In addition, local ground forces fell to RAF command and became known as the RAF Levies.

The first major test for the RAF's ability to defend the mandate came with the possibility of war with Turkey in 1922; accordingly, 5 squadrons of aircraft and 6 battalions of troops were moved north to protect Mosul.⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter, a more immediate threat arose from Shaykh Mahmud, the Kurdish governor of Sulaymaniya, who appeared to be working with Turkish forces and Shi'i dissidents to foment a general rebellion against the British. Accordingly, two columns of levies were

³⁶Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, for St. Antony's College, Oxford, Middle East Centre, 1976), p. 4.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁸L/P&S/18/B320, Wilson, "Use of Aeroplanes in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf," Apr. 1919. Bringing the 3 RAF squadrons up to strength at that time, Wilson argued, would allow a reduction of 50% in the number of Indian troops stationed in Mesopotamia. He also advocated the stationing of a flight of airplanes at Bushire in the Gulf, on the same grounds of reducing ground troops. In fact, this step was taken soon after but the planes were returned to Iraq in autumn 1921. L/P&S/18/B414, "Air Communications in the Persian Gulf."

³⁹Salmond left Iraq in 1924 to become the first Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Air Defences of Great Britain.

⁴⁰Detail of RAF activities in Iraq in the early 1920s is given in John Salmond, "The Air Force in Iraq," *JRUSI*, Vol. 70, No. 479 (Aug. 1925), pp. 483-498; Hyde, *British Air Policy*, pp. 167-174; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, pp. 259-272; and J.D. Lunt, "Air Control: Another Myth?" *RUSI – Journal of the Royal United Service Institute for Defence Studies* (RUSI), Vol. 126, No. 4 (Dec. 1981), pp. 66-68.

organized to force Turkish troops out of Iraqi territory and to advance on the Kurdish strongholds. Air support was of inestimable value, given the rugged mountains of Kurdistan, and the hit-and-run tactics of the Kurdish rebels.⁴¹ Shortly afterward, in September 1924, 50 Turkish soldiers were killed when attacked by the RAF after crossing the border into Iraq.

The use of air control for punitive measures was clearly seen as amply justified elsewhere in the mandate. By the time Salmond had vacated his command, 288 air operations had been carried out, not including the 1923-1924 action in Kurdistan. One notable instance was the air action taken to bring the *shaykhs* of al-Rumaytha and al-Samawa (south of Baghdad, along the Euphrates River and astride the Baghdad-Basra railway) under government control. In May 1924, the first airlift of British Army personnel ever was undertaken to prevent sectarian troubles in Kirkuk from spreading. At about the same time, several squadrons from the RAF Station at Amman, supported by armored cars, successfully routed an Ikhwan attack on Amman. While the Ikhwan never again threatened Transjordan to such a degree, the RAF was kept busy in the next few years attempting to thwart attacks on the nomadic tribes of Iraq.

The decision to give control of Iraq to the RAF seemed to be justified by its successful operations and efficiency in the first few years. After reviewing the various successful air actions of a punitive nature undertaken by the RAF in its first six months of control, an official report of the mandate administration noted that

the effectiveness of air control would be only partially considered if mention was omitted of its value as a threat and as a means to close co-ordination and co-operation of administrative effort over an immense area, etc., provided with other means of communication. An aeroplane or formation of aeroplanes either employed for the purpose or on some administrative duty can be seen in the air by a widely spread population and provides a tactful but effective reminder to many of the existence and power of Government.⁴²

The air control scheme was also popular from an economic view: the £32m in military expenditure of 1920-21 fell to £4m in 1926-27.⁴³ Furthermore, as Winston Churchill noted, "The maintenance of British aircraft in Iraq also enabled any part of the Middle East to be reinforced without trouble or expense, and without any ostentatious movement of force."⁴⁴

The RAF in Aden

The resounding success of air operations in Iraq had a stimulating effect on the RAF's employment elsewhere. A local uprising on the North-West Frontier was suppressed entirely by air

⁴¹"It came to be almost an annual affair, this chase through the Kurdish mountains, and was therefore never conclusive, but it did keep the Kurds in their place at relatively little cost." Lunt, "Air Control," p. 67.

⁴²AIR/19/131, "Report on Iraqi Administration, Apr. 1922 – Mar. 1923."

⁴³Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 259.

⁴⁴Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of 25 Feb. 1927, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Companion to Vol. 5 (1922-1939)*, Part 1 (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 955.

in 1927.⁴⁵ Seven instances of air operations took place in Aden between 1919 and 1927, against tribes in the Protectorate, tribes in Yemen (to free Col. Jacob's mission to the Imam in 1919), and the Imam of Yemen's forces. All were judged successful, even though four of the missions consisted only of overhead flights and/or dropping warnings.⁴⁶ An even more dramatic example of the RAF's value came in Afghanistan during the winter of 1928-1929, when rebel forces besieged King Amanullah in his capital at Kabul. With all contact with the outside world cut off, an RAF airlift racked up 28,160 miles in flights between Peshawar and Kabul and evacuated 586 individuals of various nationalities.⁴⁷

Despite these "advertisements" for the effectiveness of the RAF in policing and imperial defense, Trenchard still faced considerable opposition from the other services. The Admiralty was particularly hostile to RAF control over all air service, claiming jurisdiction over all forces above the sea, as well as on and under it. The debate over Singapore, which had received increasing attention in the 1920s because of its potential value as a base for naval fleets operating against Japan in the Pacific, was illustrative of this struggle: Trenchard unsuccessfully argued, with some support from Churchill, for reliance on air power to defend Singapore as a far less costly alternative to naval guns.⁴⁸

But even as the Air Ministry lost the fight for Singapore, it was more successful in gaining control of the other major East-of-Suez fortress at Aden. Admiralty opposition was based on Aden's importance as a naval base and its vulnerability to the Japanese navy unless defended by coast-defense guns. The Army stressed that troops on the ground were necessary to prevent the forces of the Imam of Yemen from overrunning the Protectorate. The possibility of settling the frontier question between Yemen and Aden through diplomacy had grown increasingly remote because of both the Imam's inherent obduracy and the support given him by Italy, Britain's increasingly dangerous rival in the Red Sea. The alternative of mounting a ground campaign, involving a full infantry division at a cost of more than £1 million, was dismaying.⁴⁹ The kidnapping of several

⁴⁵AIR/19/131, "Use of the R.A.F. on the N.W. Frontier of India," n.d.

⁴⁶AIR/5/1300, "Aden Air Operations Summary," 1919-1938.

⁴⁷Hyde, *British Air Policy*, pp. 203-208.

⁴⁸James Neidpath, *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 92-94. On 12 Dec. 1924, Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, arguing that "There ought to be a large economy in using air power instead of submarines for this purpose," and suggested that heavy bombing machines might even be substituted for the proposed batteries of guns. "If so, how much better to have this cost represented in mobile air squadrons rather than tied up forever to one spot in two heavy batteries." See Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, Vol. 5 (1922-1939) (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 72. For the text of the letter, see the Companion to Vol. 5, Part 1 (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 300.

⁴⁹In connection with the threat from the Imam, the Air Ministry had noted earlier that "It is apparent that the present military garrison of Aden is entirely inadequate to undertake punitive measures which will restore the situation, and the Resident has stated that the aircraft of his Garrison form the only military weapon which he is able to employ beyond a one day's March from the Aden settlement." Furthermore, the existing flight of aircraft at Aden

Protectorate *shaykhs* by the Imam's forces in February 1928 and their capture of al-Dali' a little later provided a golden opportunity for the RAF. A single bomber squadron, which had replaced one of the two battalions of troops at Aden, was able to push the Imam's forces back into Yemen within a month, and their success was repeated after a similar incursion a few months later. The total cost of the operation was £8,567 and one British casualty.⁵⁰

As a final clincher, Winston Churchill again saved the day for the RAF. As Chancellor of the Exchequer during this period, he was particularly keen on expanding the economies that the RAF had already produced in Iraq. In a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence on Aden, Churchill intervened and disposed of the other services' arguments by pointing out, as the committee's secretary later described it, that

the distance from Tokyo to Aden was a matter of six or seven thousand miles, and [Churchill] dwelt upon a few of the risks which a Japanese Fleet would run in the course of their long voyage. Did anyone seriously imagine that the attempt would be made? Having demolished the Admiralty case to his own complete satisfaction, he proceeded to deal with the apprehensions of the War Office. "And now I turn from the Mikado to the Imam," was his opening gambit. There was no need for further argument.⁵¹

The projected annual savings of over £100,000 did not hurt his case.⁵²

Accordingly, the RAF took over military responsibility for Aden in April 1928.⁵³ The new garrison was to consist of one RAF squadron, a section of armored cars, and a small body of local levies. The Indian battalion stationed at Aden had been withdrawn at the beginning of the year but the British battalion remained until 1929 to allow time for the levies to be raised.⁵⁴ The transfer of defense responsibilities not only meant that the gradual retreat from a presence in the Protectorate (at the time of transfer, the army garrison was able to extend its influence only 25 miles into the

was seen as clearly inadequate. AIR/9/55, "Notes on the Permanent Garrison at Aden," 15 Jan. 1926. RAF aircraft had been permanently stationed at Aden since 1920.

⁵⁰R.A. Cochrane, "The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden," *JRUSI*, Vol. 76, No. 501 (Feb. 1931), pp. 92-95; Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, pp. 281-282; Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 570; and C.G. Grey, *A History of the Air Ministry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), p. 204. The bombing of San'a' from Kamaran Island, then under British control but not so sovereignty, was briefly raised and rejected because of expected international complications. AIR/9/55, note on "Kamaran Island," 29 May 1930; AIR/8/99, CID, Persian Gulf Sub-committee, meeting of 22 Nov. 1928.

⁵¹Lord Ismay, *Memoirs* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 60. Trenchard's argument is contained in AIR/9/55; Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff, "The Garrison of Aden," Feb. 1927.

⁵²The expenses of forces in Aden totalled £479,000 for maintenance in 1927-1928; in 1930, after the RAF had taken control, they were estimated at £340,000. AIR/9/55, unidentified note, 15 Mar. 1930.

⁵³The transfer of defense responsibilities followed the transfer of political responsibilities from the Government of India to the Imperial Government, represented by the Secretary of State for Colonies, in December 1926. The subsequent definition of functions is outlined in an India Office note on "Aden and Its Administration," 1 Apr. 1931, copy in AIR/9/55.

⁵⁴Cochrane, "Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden," p. 91.

hinterland) could be reversed, but that expansion was necessary. The Protectorate became the first line of Aden's defense since, for the most effective use of the air weapon, as much prior warning as possible was necessary to maximize the period of air attack.⁵⁵

Given the comparatively short range of aircraft of that time, landing grounds at regular intervals were a necessity, particularly along the coast on the route developed to link Aden with Iraq. In addition, airplanes and landing grounds allowed political officers to visit tribes and settlements in the interior, some of which had not been visited in over 25 years. At the same time, of course, the RAF squadron was periodically engaged in punitive actions against both Protectorate tribes and the Imam's forces crossing the border (Table 2.1). Not all actions required bombing – in some cases the dropping of warning leaflets or even mere overflights sufficed to gain the offending parties' compliance. Of the relatively few Arab casualties, most were due to skirmishes with friendly tribes or the levies and not from air action. As of the beginning of World War II, only one RAF officer lost his life in these operations. As one officer involved in air control in Aden summarized it,

It is difficult, perhaps, to find a parallel to this peace time control exercised by the Royal Air Force, but I would suggest that the Royal Air Force has only been continuing in the interior the same civilizing work which the Navy has carried out with such success along the coasts of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.

The RAF in the Gulf

There were strong similarities in the reasons behind the transfer of military responsibility to the RAF in Iraq and Aden. In both territories, Britain had assumed varying degrees of direct control, while security was threatened internally by rebellious tribes in the hinterland and externally by hostile neighbors. Reliance on air control eliminated the need for large army garrisons. Both were seen as strategically important linkages in the network of imperial defense, especially for the RAF. Most of these factors were far less applicable to the smaller littoral states of the Gulf. Nevertheless, the Air Ministry sought to extend its influence from Iraq and Aden to the entire Arab Gulf littoral, and used several incidents in the late 1920s as ammunition in the bureaucratic battle.

The first of these was the emerging Ikhwan threat to British-controlled territories and subjects. The Ikhwan had been created by Ibn Sa'ud about 1914 in an effort to channel the martial enthusiasm of newly sedentarized Bedouin into serving Wahhabi and Al Sa'ud expansionism. While the Ikhwan had constituted the principal forces in Ibn Sa'ud's conquest of Jabal Shammar, Hijaz and 'Asir, by the mid-1920s they had grown increasingly uncontrollable by the Saudi ruler. Eventually, faced with growing rebelliousness, Ibn Sa'ud was forced to take up arms against his own creation and destroy Ikhwan power through pitched battles.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule*, p. 282.

⁵⁶On the Ikhwan, see John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Saudi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978); and Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 127-150. See also Chapter Six. It should be noted that the question of whether Ibn Sa'ud was responsible for these raids or simply lacked control over the Ikhwan was somewhat confused, partly

The effects of the Ikhwan rebellion were not limited to Saudi territory but spilled over into Transjordan and Iraq where the British had installed kings from the Hashimi family, who had been ousted from their home in the Hijaz and became bitter rivals of the Al Sa'ud. While tribal raiding had long been a fact of life along the Saudi-Iraqi and Saudi-Transjordan desert frontiers, the introduction of the Ikhwan tended to transform camel-raids into massacres. In November 1927, Ikhwan forces raided an Iraqi police post at Busayra, killing several dozen individuals. Similar raids soon followed, with Ibn Sa'ud largely powerless to prevent them. The British sought to extend the air control scheme to counter these new raids and established a system of Special Service Officers (SSO), mainly drawn from the ranks of RAF intelligence, to familiarize themselves with the tribes along the frontier and direct RAF attacks (using both armored cars and aircraft) against intruders.⁵⁷

As a consequence of the Ikhwan rebellion, Kuwait became of direct interest to the RAF. Ikhwan raiders not only passed through Kuwaiti territory on their way to Iraq but, beginning in December 1927, also attacked Kuwaiti tribes. Furthermore, existing RAF bases in Iraq were too far from the Najdi border for aerial activity to be of much help. It is not surprising, then, that a proposal, strongly supported by the Air Ministry, should be made to use Kuwait as a base for attacking Ikhwan bases in Najd. Additional weight for this course seemed to be provided by the steady deterioration of Kuwaiti-Saudi relations following the death of Shaykh Mubarak of Kuwait.⁵⁸

As the Ikhwan raids intensified, it became obvious that defenseless Kuwait was exceedingly vulnerable to occasional Ikhwan incursions and perhaps even a full invasion. Nevertheless, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, backed by the Government of India, resisted proposed RAF operations out of Kuwait. His objection was based in part on a fear of undermining Kuwait's independence *vis-à-vis* Iraq, but it also appeared to reflect bureaucratic rivalries within British officialdom, particularly between the Colonial Office and the Air Ministry, operating in Iraq, and the India Office, hitherto unchallenged along the Gulf littoral. Nevertheless, the increasing seriousness of the situation led to the dispatch of Captain Gerald de Gaury, the SSO in Basra, to Kuwait in early 1928 for several months.⁵⁹ When Ibn Sa'ud's counterattacks against the Ikhwan in late 1929 forced

because of Ibn Sa'ud's employment of Ikhwan raids against British-controlled territory in earlier years.

⁵⁷On the RAF role in countering the Ikhwan raiding in Iraq and Transjordan, see Helms, *Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 225-249; Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), pp. 93-135; John Bagot Glubb, *The War in the Desert: An R.A.F. Frontier Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960); and idem, *Arabian Adventures* (London: Cassell, 1978). Glubb was one of the first SSOs to be appointed, although he was not from the RAF. He later served in the Iraqi civil administration and the Transjordanian armed forces, commanding the Arab Legion from 1939 to 1956. See also the reminiscences of Glubb and Air Chief Marshal Sir Alfred Earle about their experiences in the Middle East, as recorded by the Imperial War Museum, Department of Sound Records, "Middle East: British Military Personnel 1919-1939."

⁵⁸Much of the dispute had arisen from the 1922 Iraqi-Najdi agreement of 'Uqayr, which resulted in the creation of the Saudi-Iraqi and Saudi-Kuwaiti Neutral Zones and defined certain territory traditionally considered to be Kuwaiti as belonging to the Al Sa'ud. Later, Ibn Sa'ud imposed an economic blockade on Kuwait as a means of gaining a share of Kuwait's prosperity, derived from its role as an entrepot for the surrounding hinterland. Helms, *Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 243-244.

⁵⁹R/15/5/279, various correspondence.

them northeast toward the Kuwaiti-Iraqi borders, permission was grudgingly given for Glubb to operate in Kuwait with RAF aircraft and armored cars and the Iraqi Desert Police.⁶⁰

Even the temporary stationing of an SSO on Kuwaiti territory in 1928 pointed toward a precedent bitterly opposed by India and its representatives. H.R.P. Dickson, the Political Agent in Kuwait, registered strong opposition to the reposting of an SSO during the height of the Ikhwan crushing in 1929. When the RAF in Iraq suggested in 1932 that the SSO Basra be allowed to make regular visits to Kuwait, Dickson again objected (and was supported by the PRPG), claiming that the SSO in Basra and even Glubb had tried to discredit him during the Ikhwan rebellion.⁶¹ Nevertheless, occasional visits were allowed. At the other end of the Gulf, a temporary SSO was assigned to Sharjah in 1932-1933 during the construction of the resthouse there.⁶²

The Kuwait precedent led to the posting of an RAF intelligence officer, euphemistically termed an Air Liaison Officer (later redesignated Air Staff Liaison Officer), in Bahrain in early 1937, over the PRPG's objections. The instructions of AHQ Iraq to the Air Staff Liaison Officer in 1946 set out such duties as collecting and transmitting information on tribal matters, following the development of oil resources, keeping tabs on landing grounds and alighting areas, and assisting the RAF station commander in Bahrain in his contacts with local authorities.⁶³

RAF action in scouting for and then harrying Ikhwan raiders constituted one argument for the introduction of RAF personnel into the Gulf states, even if temporarily. The incidents in 1928 at Sur, a maritime village at the southeastern tip of Oman, provided somewhat heavier ammunition for the RAF, even though the ramifications of the rebellion there were far less significant than the Ikhwan insurrection. Sur is principally inhabited by two tribes, al-Janaba and Bani Bu 'Ali, with the latter concentrated in the suburb of al-'Ayqa. The history of British dealings with the Bani Bu 'Ali go back to the disastrous expedition to Bilad Bani Bu 'Ali in the early 19th century, and the tribe's boats were heavily involved in slavetrading and gunrunning in the latter half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries.

As early as 1923, the Bani Bu 'Ali asserted that Sur lay outside the sultan's jurisdiction and refused to acknowledge his customs post there. Matters came to a head in 1928 when the tribe sought to extend their control over the Janaba quarters of Sur and built their own customs post at al-

⁶⁰Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*, p. 186. A final complication arose when many of the Ikhwan surrendered to RAF authorities in Kuwait. After considerable internal debate, HMG considered itself bound to turn them over to Ibn Sa'ud, which was done at the end of January 1930. A few weeks later, Ibn Sa'ud and King Faysal of Iraq met for the first time and an initial step was made toward burying the traditional enmity between the two royal houses. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-193.

⁶¹R/15/5/279, Dickson to H.V. Biscoe, PRPG, 18 Feb. 1932.

⁶²R/15/2/269, various correspondence.

⁶³R/15/5/279, AHQ Iraq, Air Staff Instruction No. 10/46. The ASLO's area of concern consisted of the Arabian Peninsula coast from the Shatt al-'Arab to the boundary of the RAF's Iraq command on the coast of Oman.

‘Ayqa.⁶⁴ The ability of the sultan to restore his authority in Sur was minimal, since the resources at his disposal amounted to a small patrol steamer and about 70 men of the Muscat Infantry, an inadequate number to face the armed tribesmen. He requested British assistance to put down the insurrection.

In analyzing the alternative courses of action, the Political Agent in Muscat ventured that naval bombardment would have meager results. Instead, he suggested that a battalion of Indian infantry be stationed at Sur for a year or two, with the costs being recovered out of increased customs collections and possibly the introduction of Sur as a port of call for British India Company slow mail steamers.⁶⁵ The Air Ministry, however, divined another golden opportunity to show the benefits of air power. An internal memorandum suggested that aircraft be used in a demonstration flight over Sur and perhaps to land the sultan's British advisor there and, if necessary, bombard the *shaykh's* fort by Wapitis. It concludes that

This case if we bring it offrightly would be of the greatest value for substitution. The navy has bombarded and proved a failure. Military forces cannot be afforded even to occupy Sur. We may bring it off without bombardment; or by a discriminate bombardment destroying only the Shaikh's fort. After all that has been said against air action it would be a great triumph.⁶⁶

The Air Ministry won the day and the customs post in al-‘Ayqa was bombed and levelled in 1930. Even non-RAF officials judged the operations as "quite a success."⁶⁷

The Sur operation constituted one of the few instances of air control in the Arab Gulf states. This is not surprising since Britain had no direct presence in any of these states, apart from a few political representatives, and exercised no responsibility for internal affairs. Both Kuwait and Sur represented murky legal territory, and British involvement could be justified legally only on grounds of providing assistance to sovereign rulers who had requested it. Officials negotiating facilities for the air route along the Trucial Coast more than once suggested air action to bring recalcitrant *shaykhs* around – although their suggestions were quickly scotched. Until well after World War II, the only additional instance of the RAF taking action against the local population in these states occurred in

⁶⁴J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), pp. 126-128; and R/15/3/65, G.P. Murphy, "Report on Sur," 9 Oct. 1928. The Bani Bu ‘Ali apparently also raised the Saudi flag over al-‘Ayqa, thereby reviving a longstanding connection with the Al Sa‘ud which dated to the latter's invasion of that part of Oman in the early 19th century and the conversion of the Bani Bu ‘Ali to Wahhabism at that time. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, p. 153.

⁶⁵R/15/3/65, G.P. Murphy, "Report on Sur," 9 Oct. 1928.

⁶⁶AIR/9/57, "Note on Possible Operations at Sur," 27 May 1930. The memorandum also suggested that Biscoe, the PRPG, "has the usual complex about resentment, bombs, mosques, women and children and if we can show him good photographs we shall have gained a useful friend." A small naval bombardment had been carried out in November 1928, destroying a small fort behind Sur in order to "impress tribesmen of intention of British to support Muscat and ability to do so." Commander-in-Chief East Indies to Admiralty, 14 November 1928 (telegram), copy in AIR/9/57. But even the Navy concluded that only occupation by British troops could bring an end to the situation.

⁶⁷AIR/9/57, T.C. Fowle, Political Agent in Muscat, to Wing Commander McClaughry, n.d.

Dubai in 1934, when an aerial demonstration was made to show support of the *shaykh* against his rebellious cousins.⁶⁸

Despite the successes in Iraq and Aden, even the most avid proponents of "air control" recognized its inherent limitations. In a final paper written a few weeks before his resignation as Chief of Air Staff in 1929, Trenchard contrasted Transjordan and Palestine. In the former, he maintained, conditions were well suited for air control, particularly because of the low density of population and its tribal organization. Palestine, however, exhibited a different problem: most of its inhabitants were in urban areas and the threat to order there arose not from tribal truculence but from deep-seated divisions between Jews and Arabs. "Insurance against racial or political upheavals in such conditions is to be found neither in aircraft nor artillery, nor in infantry battalions, but in police and gendarmerie forces...."⁶⁹ Trenchard's parting shots to the other services also included arguments for replacing naval units in the Red Sea with flying boats, replacing coastal artillery with torpedo bombers and further substituting air power for ground forces in India and Africa.⁷⁰

In the main, conditions favoring the utilization of air control seemed to hold only for particular times and places. Increasingly, few territories completely beyond the pale of central authority remained after World War II. In addition, the massive bombardments of that war did much to raise public opinion against any aerial action *vis-à-vis* any civilian population. Air policing continued to be a principal instrument in the Aden Protectorate until the early 1960s, but its application in Oman in the 1950s, discussed below, displayed few benefits and provided a potent propaganda tool for anti-British forces.

THE GROWING STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE GULF

British involvement with the shaykhdoms in the 19th century had been for maritime reasons. By the turn of the century, this process had resulted in a series of treaties in which the shaykhdoms placed themselves under British protection and responsibility for foreign affairs and defense. Later, deepening British involvement was predicated on reasons of air power. While the legal nature of the relationship between Britain and the shaykhdoms remained unchanged, HMG began to exercise more concern over their internal affairs. Furthermore, as oil was discovered along the littoral, British involvement progressively intensified, and increasingly the shaykhdoms were perceived as having

⁶⁸AIR/2/1612, various correspondence.

⁶⁹CAB/24/207, "The Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence," CP 322 (29); cited in Hyde, *British Air Power*, pp. 230-231. Elizabeth Monroe contends that the 1929 rebellion in Palestine reached serious proportions (requiring reinforcements from outside the mandate) because "too much reliance had been placed on the Trenchard scheme of policing by means of the R.A.F.," thereby resulting in a reduction of the army garrison. *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-71* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 81. However, Trenchard pointed out after the rebellion that the army had been responsible for the reduction of the garrison in Palestine, which he had opposed. Hyde, *British Air Policy*, p. 230.

⁷⁰Smith, *British Air Strategy*, p. 31.

an intrinsic importance rather than deriving it solely from their strategic location between London and India.

The Persian Gulf Sub-Committee

The first major review of British policy in the Gulf in nearly twenty years was initiated in the late 1920s when the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) created a Persian Gulf Sub-committee (PGSC).⁷¹ The Air Ministry was quick to use this convenient forum to advance its position for a greater say in Gulf policy, basing its arguments on the successes of the RAF in Iraq and later in the Aden Protectorate and Sur. The parallel between Iraq and the Arab littoral was not exact since there could be no question of the RAF assuming an air control scheme for the Arab Gulf littoral, as Britain maintained no direct military presence in any of the shaykhdoms. Nevertheless, a heated debate over the means of securing the defense of Gulf arose between the RAF and the Royal Navy, and involved the Foreign, Colonial, and India Offices as well. In Trenchard's view, RAF control of the British sphere of influence in the Gulf (beyond Iraq) was not simply a matter of status *vis-à-vis* the Admiralty but a necessary stage in the global expansion of the "thin red lines" of imperial air routes, which themselves were testimony to the value of the RAF in overseas defense.

Trenchard began the offensive with an Air Staff Memorandum in May 1928.⁷² Basing his argument on "certain problems" that arose during recent operations in Iraq and Aden, Trenchard argued that the full value of air power required devolution of greater authority to the RAF and the unification of political control over the Middle East.⁷³ The battle was escalated with his remarks on the Government of India's response to the rebellion at Sur: "The view of the Air Staff that the Navy – though it can carry out most efficiently its proper role of controlling sea communications in the

⁷¹As proposed by the Prime Minister on 25 June 1928, the composition of the subcommittee included Sir Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; Lord Hailsham, Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer; L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs and Colonies; the Earl of Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India; Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air; W.C. Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty; Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, President of the Board of Trade; Viscount Peel, First Commissioner of Works; and Lt. Colonel Sir M.P.A. Hankey, Secretary to the CID, and Major H.L. Ismay, the Assistant Secretary. The minutes of the subcommittee are contained in CAB/16/93 and its memoranda in CAB/16/94. An interim report of the subcommittee (No. 169-3, Oct. 1928), incorporating the points made by the Chiefs of Staff, cited below, was approved by the cabinet on 5 Nov. 1928 [Cabinet 41(28)].

⁷²CAB/16/94, "The Use of Air Power as Illustrated by the Recent Operations in Arabia," 8 May 1928; printed as Cabinet Paper 160 (28).

⁷³In addressing the "problems," Trenchard suggested that their reoccurrence could be prevented by closer cooperation between the AOC and local authorities, improved intelligence for air operations, more latitude given local authorities in initiating air action, and greater independence given air authorities in carrying out operations without recourse to the other services. As a final point, he noted the complications of fragmented political control and argued that a single department be given responsibility for the Peninsula, Iraq and Transjordan – and even went so far as to suggest that the India Office and Government of India relieve themselves of their responsibilities in Arabia. *Ibid.*

Gulf – cannot be expected to extend its influence inland is strikingly borne out by the views of the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies."⁷⁴

The debate gathered full steam following the CID's creation of the Persian Gulf Subcommittee (PGSC) to re-examine British interests in the Gulf as a result of the air routes and growing exports of oil.⁷⁵ The importance of the topic was confirmed by the subcommittee's endorsement of the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff that "the maintenance of British supremacy in the Persian Gulf is even more essential to the security of India and Imperial interests at the present time than it was in the past" and its related conclusion that "it should be a cardinal feature of our policy to maintain our supremacy in the region."⁷⁶

At an early meeting of the subcommittee, Trenchard pressed his case by stressing the importance of the imperial air chain through the Gulf, declaring that "A rupture of the Persian Gulf link would be just as grave a disaster to the Air Force as the closing of the Suez Canal would be to the Navy."⁷⁷ In addition, he raised the possibility of a Russian air threat to the Gulf through Persia, comparing it in naval terms to "the establishment of a Russian submarine base in the Persian Gulf." In order to contain the Russian threat, Trenchard placed utmost importance on continuation of the Persian coast civil route while also recommending the quick development of an alternative route along the Arab coast. There was little argument on this point and the subcommittee directed that the Arabian route "should be pressed forward with all possible speed."⁷⁸

Trenchard's attacks on other departments' responsibilities in the Middle East, however, did not go unchallenged. The Colonial Secretary observed that Trenchard's remarks "are almost exclusively Service considerations," and contended that HMG must often adopt courses of action

⁷⁴AIR/9/57, "Note on the recent incident at Sur, as illustrating the futility of the methods of control of the Arab littoral as proposed by Sir Denys Bray and the Government of India and the political significance of incidents of this nature," 3 Dec. 1928.

⁷⁵One enduring result of the subcommittee's work was the publication for official use of a "Historical Summary of Events in Territories of the Ottoman Empire, Persia and Arabia affecting the British Position in the Persian Gulf, 1907-1928" (CID, PGSC, Memorandum PG 13). This comprehensive 170-page document essentially brought up to date the earlier efforts of J.G. Lorimer's *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*.

⁷⁶CAB/16/93, CID, PGSC, Minutes of 5th Meeting, 24 Oct. 1928; copy in AIR/8/99. The Chiefs of Staff judged, in addition to the above-quoted conclusion, that "although the source of the potential dangers to our interests has changed, the dangers remain; and with the advent of air power, they have increased rather than diminished." In particular, they suggested such measures to maintain supremacy as prevention of the establishment by any foreign power of a naval base in the Gulf, the exclusion – as far as possible – of foreign air undertakings within striking distance of the Gulf, the retention of sufficient harbor facilities for the Navy, the securing of strategic and civil air routes along the shores of the Gulf, and maintenance of the political status quo in the Gulf, particularly along the Arabian littoral. CAB/16/94, CID, PGSC, Memorandum P.G. 12, "The Persian Gulf; Report by the Chiefs of Staff," 11 Oct. 1928.

⁷⁷CAB/16/93, CID, PGSC, Minutes of 5th Meeting, 24 Oct. 1928.

⁷⁸Ibid.

based on equally compelling considerations that do not allow the adoption of air power to its fullest advantage.⁷⁹

Sir Denys Bray, Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, challenged Trenchard face-to-face in a meeting of the subcommittee. While acknowledging the usefulness of air power in some situations, as along the North West Frontier, Bray found fault with Trenchard's demand for greater political control by air officers in air operations. He rejected the suggestion that the Government of India should "commit harikari" in the Gulf, remarking "For what is wrong with the Persian Gulf? Nothing on the Arab littoral, for which the Government of India are responsible. What is wrong on the Arab littoral is the backwash of British recession on the Persian littoral, for which the Government of India are not responsible."⁸⁰ Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, thereupon cited the RAF's problems in using Kuwait during the Ikhwan operations.

With these opening contentions, a combative discussion commenced:

BRAY: If the contention is that there is something seriously wrong with the Arabian littoral, I would, of course, pause to develop another line of argument. But I really think the statement that the Arabian littoral is in good case is one which holds water. HOARE: I should not like to be taken to agree with that. TRENCHARD: Our reconnaissance party, which you sanctioned to examine the Trucial area, were chased out. BRAY: You penetrated into the hinterland, which we do not profess to administer. HOARE: On the Arab littoral you have to look both ways, to Ibn Saud on the one hand, and to Persia on the other. BRAY: Most certainly. HOARE: And the most serious trouble in the last two or three years has been that with Ibn Saud. The situation last year was very difficult. ... BRAY: Koweit has been linked up, rather unfortunately, as we in India think, in its fortunes with Irak. If Ibn Saud has any gratitude in him, while he owes none to Irak or Feisal, he does owe a good deal to Koweit, as it was in Koweit that he took asylum years ago. Koweit is suffering from the trouble between Ibn Saud and Irak, partly because it has become linked up with Irak, and partly because the Air Force use it as part of the air route for getting at Ibn Saud. TRENCHARD: After Koweit was attacked and raided. AMERY: Your argument almost assumes that in any trouble between the British Government in Irak and Ibn Saud, India is a friendly neutral and not equally concerned. I do not want to interrupt, but I do hold the view that Koweit ... ought to go with Irak. BRAY: I do not know whether it would be profitable for me to try to enlarge on the assumption; but I do not agree with it for a moment as you put it. I feel myself that the position in what I must now define as the Indian sphere of the Arab littoral is sound and wholesome. Sir Hugh Trenchard's note speaks throughout of "operations" and "enemy," and "offence," and so forth. But the normal state of Bahrein, and of the Trucial Sheikdoms, and of Muscat, is one of peace – not necessarily, of course, peace amongst themselves on land, not necessarily, of course, peace between the Sultan of Muscat and his unruly tribes in the hinterland, but peace with us and peace on the sea. TRENCHARD: British forces were in action at Muscat last week. The Navy actually bombarded. BRAY: How often does the Navy bombard in a year in the Gulf? A few shots? ... MADDEN (Sir Charles Madden, Admiral of the Fleet, First Sea Lord, and Chief of the Naval Staff): This particular case happened at Sur. A mud fort, occupied by a man who had stolen and looted a British dhow, was

⁷⁹CAB/16/94, CID, PGSC, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," P.G. 29, 16 Nov. 1928. While expressing sympathy with Trenchard's desire to reduce the number of departments involved in Middle Eastern consultations, Amery noted that "Occurrences in Iraq and Arabia, apparently trivial in themselves, frequently have important repercussions in India and in Europe," thus requiring the interest of the Foreign and India Offices. He also declined to second the recommendation that the Colonial Office take over administration of the Gulf states.

⁸⁰CAB/16/93, CID, PGSC, Minutes of 8th Meeting, 22 Nov. 1928.

knocked down. It was not political trouble. BRAY: On an average, I should say that we have to use force in the Gulf once a year; and force there is a very small thing. The Gulf, where it is inhabited, consists of petty townships lying on the coast, with the Shaikh's fort as a very pretty target which the Navy have not the slightest trouble in hitting every time. More valuable from the ordinary political control point of view is the relentless patience which the Navy can display. The Navy can take the Resident and lie off some recalcitrant Sheikh for a week or ten days, give the terms, and impose its will without firing a shot. That is the routine when we have trouble with a Sheikh. So that, while I can conceive occasions on which the R.A.F. might with advantage be asked for assistance in dealing with a Sheikh – I can conceive it with difficulty – and while I feel very strongly that the influence of the strategical air route along the Arab littoral is going to be very far-reaching in many ways on the whole position in the Gulf, and on these Arab Sheikhdoms in particular, yet I also feel strongly that it is quite premature to suggest that the Navy should retire. TRENCHARD: May I interrupt for a moment to say that I have never suggested that. I agree with all that you say about the Navy on the coast. But this Committee have already made recommendations regarding the air route along the Arabian littoral which you yourself have said is vital. That air route cannot possibly be protected by the Navy from Ibn Saud and the interior.

Trenchard continued his offensive at the final meeting of the PGSC a few months later, noting that reliance on naval pressure to support government policy had severe limitations.⁸¹ Naval bombardment, he contended, was not effective beyond the beach, and since the Gulf was so shallow there was not always a beach. Hoare spoke up in support of Trenchard:

The fact of the matter was that a new situation had arisen with which the old machinery was not fitted to deal. There were two entirely new problems. The first was air defence, the second the air route. [Hoare urged] acceptance of the first proposal of the Chief of the Air Staff, namely, that the broad principles of air control should be widely circulated. This would be an immense help to the Air Staff at home and to Air Officers Commanding abroad, since the problem of air control was so novel that the ordinary civil official, who had never been in contact with it, did not understand how it should be used.⁸²

The second problem, Hoare added, should be resolved by an interdepartmental committee, a suggestion accepted by the others.

The end result of this search for a rationalization of political control in the Gulf was the decision in 1930 to set up two standing committees to deal with Middle Eastern questions concerning two or more departments. One was to be official, with representatives from the Treasury, Foreign, War and India Offices, the Air Ministry, and the Admiralty, to deal with specific problems. The other was conceived as ministerial, composed of the heads of the abovementioned departments, and would deal with questions that the official committee could not resolve. In addition, the cabinet provided local officials with greater latitude to deal with all problems (except those concerning the air route), close cooperation was urged between the AOC Iraq and the PRPG (as well as with the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, and his subordinate, the Senior Naval Representative in the Gulf),

⁸¹Trenchard had begun with a remark on Bray's observation that India's special position in the Gulf was due to its proximity: "That was quite true in the past; but the position was now completely reversed. Formerly, the route to the Gulf was via India; whereas at the present time, the quickest route to India was via the Gulf." CAB/16/93, CID, PGSC, Minutes of 9th Meeting, 18 Mar. 1929.

⁸²Ibid.

and transfer of the Resident's headquarters across the Gulf was urged, "in view of the growing importance of the Arab littoral."⁸³

Developments in the 1930s

Despite the disbanding of the PGSC and the adoption of these recommendations, the Gulf policy battle was not over. Perceptions of the Gulf's importance continued to grow, while potential threats to the British position were given close attention. Safeguarding the air routes through the Gulf occupied high priority. The difficulties with the Persian government over the air route and treaty left a marked impression in the minds of British officials in the Gulf, some of whom maintained that the affair had lessened British influence on the Arab littoral. The Government of India's proposal to drastically reduce the size of naval operations in the Gulf, in order to save money, was seen as a serious mistake, given the PRPG's reliance on the navy for transportation around the Gulf and the establishment of a Persian navy.⁸⁴ Admission of American oil companies to Gulf concessions was viewed with trepidation.

The optimal outlines of British policy in the Gulf were summarized by the PRPG in 1931: to maintain the independence of the Arab Shaikhdoms so long as they preserve law and order and maintain a system of administration that will satisfy or at any rate be tolerated by their subjects, to avoid any greater degree of interference in their internal affairs than is forced upon us but at the same time to prevent any other foreign power from dominating them or obtaining any special privileges in the Gulf.⁸⁵

The Resident observed that London had begun to display a much greater concern with Gulf affairs than previously. In part, this was due to the emergence of the Gulf's importance to imperial, rather than Indian, interests, such as the air routes, oil, protection of the Shatt al-'Arab, and relations with Ibn Sa'ud. At the same time, it was noted that the changing political environment in India meant that control of Gulf affairs inevitably would pass at some point from the Government of India to HMG.⁸⁶

The question of changing British policy toward the Gulf states was raised several years later by the next PRPG, T.C. Fowle, who specifically referred to growing British intrusion into the

⁸³CAB/16/93, CID Paper 175-D (Aug. 1930), containing the Cabinet conclusions of meetings held on 23 July 1930 [Cabinet 44(30)] and 30 July 1930 [Cabinet 46(30)], held to consider the "Report of the Sub-committee on Political Control in the Persian Gulf," CID Paper 174-D (Dec. 1929); copy in AIR/8/99.

⁸⁴One incongruous result of this proposal was the opposition of the AOC Iraq, who pointed out the necessity of these ships for the defense of Basra and the south Persian oilfields. L/P&S/12/3727, Air Vice Marshal E.R. Ludlow-Hewitt to the High Commissioner, Baghdad, 15 Jan. 1932.

⁸⁵L/P&S/12/3727, H.V. Biscoe to F.V. Wylie, Deputy Secretary (Foreign) to the Government of India, 24 Nov. 1931. Biscoe's note was generated in response to a note by the Indian Foreign Secretary, E.B. Howell, on the same subject.

⁸⁶Ibid. Despite this conclusion, however, Biscoe voiced his opinion that the problem of Gulf policy being controlled from Whitehall but administration from India could be solved by placing all responsibility in the hands of the Secretary of State for India.

internal affairs of the Trucial Coast. After noting Britain's basic responsibilities there – the protection of British Indian subjects, the prevention of hostilities by sea, and the safety of the air route – he pointed out that the exertion of strong pressure to gain air route facilities had caused the *shaykhs* of the Trucial Coast to fear future British interference in their politics.⁸⁷ While the Resident observed that this fear was unfounded, nevertheless for the first time Britain had a compelling interest in the area's domestic matters – and this interest quite naturally intensified as oil exploration moved south along the littoral in the coming years.

To the RAF, the establishment of the air routes along the Arab shores, particularly the strategic route, indicated that Britain *ipso facto* had acquired responsibility for internal security in the Trucial States, even to the point of intervening in disputes between rulers.⁸⁸ This activist position in support of signatory rulers from attack by land did not go unchallenged, particularly by the Admiralty which cited British inability to protect the Shaykh of Muhammara from the Shah. Consequently, a meeting of the CID Official Subcommittee on the Middle East was convened to sort out the growing policy dispute.⁸⁹

There, the Air Ministry, referring to changed circumstances since Lord Curzon's remarks in 1903 effectively had established policy in the Gulf, pointed out that the advent of air power had both made it possible to prevent hostilities on land and, for strategic reasons, made it necessary. The Foreign Office representative observed that the Gulf had ceased being a "British lake" since Curzon's day:

To-day the Persian Gulf was one of the world's highways, bordered by strongly nationalist States, whose interest in the Gulf was real and active, and the discovery of oil had led other foreign Powers to take an increasing interest in Gulf affairs. In his view, the time had come, or was at least rapidly approaching, when His Majesty's Government would no longer be able to maintain their previous policy of merely keeping others out, and living, as it were, from hand to mouth, but would be faced with the necessity of going either forwards or backwards.⁹⁰

In particular, the ambiguous international legal status of these states undoubtedly would begin to raise questions as other countries grew interested in oil, aviation, and trade in the Gulf.

While the subcommittee agreed that ultimately international responsibility for the affairs of the Trucial Coast and Qatar must be admitted by the British government, it refrained from adopting a new policy for the area (apart from recommending the posting of an Englishman as agent in

⁸⁷L/P&S/12/3747, Fowle to Foreign Secretary, Government of India, 16 Nov. 1934. Copy in AIR/2/1612. Fowle served as PRPG for an extraordinarily lengthy period, from 1932 to 1939, and exercised perhaps the most influence of any Resident since Sir Percy Cox, who had held the position from 1904 until after the beginning of World War I. For an assessment of Fowle's impact on British policy in the Gulf, see Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates*, pp. 173-179.

⁸⁸AIR/2/1612, Air Headquarters, British Forces in Iraq, to the Secretary of State for Air, "Policy in the Persian Gulf," 18 Dec. 1934, commenting on Fowle's letter cited in previous note.

⁸⁹AIR/2/1612, CID, Standing Official Sub-Committee for Questions Concerning the Middle East, Minutes of the 42nd Meeting, 24 Sept. 1935.

⁹⁰Ibid. The remarks belonged to G.W. Rendel, Counsellor, Foreign Office.

Sharjah).⁹¹ A final comment on this unsettled matter was made in an internal Air Ministry note, which pointed out that the other departmental representatives "came to that meeting with their minds made up that the Air Ministry were going to advocate an entirely new policy – in fact a very forward policy – in the Gulf," and, as a consequence, dug their heels in.⁹²

Fowle took advantage of several other opportunities to disseminate his views on Gulf policy. In early 1937, he commented on the strategic importance of the Gulf, pointing out its role as "the Suez Canal of the air," the naval base and oilfield at Bahrain, the telegraph cables and wireless stations, and the emergence of Iranian and Iraqi armed forces in the Gulf.⁹³ Two years later, on the eve of his retirement, he ruminated on the subject at greater length, remarking that the British administration along the Arab littoral benefitted greatly from possessing the good-will of the rulers and their people. As a consequence, "this consideration ... enables us to 'run' the day-to-day administration of the Arab side with a handful of officials (one Resident, and three Political Agents), without the payment of a single rupee of subsidy, or the upkeep (on our part) of a single soldier, policeman, or levy"⁹⁴

Britain had acquired this goodwill, Fowle averred, by allowing the rulers to manage their own affairs, by giving them a "square deal" on oil and air facilities, and because the rulers and their people realized that only the British protected them from their stronger neighbors. Nevertheless, he recognized that emerging anti-British sentiments in the empire and growing democratic developments in the Gulf would cause increasing difficulties in the future, and this would make Britain's job in protecting its strategic and political interests in the region that much more difficult. Fowle's remarks were remarkably prescient, but the 1930s debate on the merits and dangers of a "forward policy" in the Gulf was abruptly superseded by wartime exigencies and the Gulf's incorporation into allied defense schemes.

The Gulf on the Eve of World War II

The strategic air routes through the Gulf loomed even more important with the growing prospect of war in the late 1930s. Fowle considered the routes to be a principal reason why the Arab littoral was more important to Britain than the Iranian, in conjunction with the oil supplies there, the naval base at Bahrain, and the borders with Saudi Arabia and Iraq. "The importance of this route is obvious, as if it is 'cut' in time of war, for the period that it remains cut no British civil aircraft, and

⁹¹The first Political Officer was assigned to the Trucial Coast in 1939. Reference was also made to the formal letter of protection provided the Ruler of Qatar in 1935, given partly as a means of securing cooperation on the oil concession and partly as a warning to Ibn Sa'ud. See Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979), pp. 76-79.

⁹²AIR/2/1612, Minute from R. Peck to the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, 25 Oct. 1935.

⁹³L/P&S/12/3727, Fowle to Sir Aubrey Metcalfe, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, 18 Jan. 1937.

⁹⁴AIR/2/1615, Fowle to Metcalfe, 17 Mar. 1939.

RAF aircraft only with difficulty (by the Aden Muscat Route) ... can reach India, Singapore or Australia."⁹⁵ (See [Table 2.2](#)) In inter-departmental discussion of defense arrangements in the Gulf, it was agreed that responsibility for defense of the Arab littoral rested with the RAF's Iraq Command, although it was felt that the chief danger of attack would come from neighboring tribes or sabotage. Since the possibility of attack by air or sea was slight, construction of fixed defenses was unnecessary. Instead, local defense forces in Bahrain and Qatar were considered, as was a scheme for expansion of Muscat's forces.⁹⁶

Bahrain was considered to be of particular importance, because of its oilfields and refinery, the naval base at Jufayr, and its selection as the future site of the Residency,⁹⁷ and a flight of RAF landplanes was based there beginning in 1938. Indeed, Bahrain's growing production during the late 1930s led to its being regarded as one of the three major sources in meeting British East-of-Suez oil requirements.⁹⁸ A final step in the preparations was the transfer of defense responsibilities from the RAF's Iraq Command to India, since India would be better suited to building up land forces for Gulf defense. This was followed by the appointment by the Chiefs of Staff India of a Military Commander for the Persian Gulf, who made an initial reconnaissance of the Gulf in June 1941.⁹⁹

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA IN WORLD WAR II

For the first time in history, a single war made its effects known on nearly every corner of the earth. Even though the Arabian Peninsula was on the far periphery of the battlefields, (to even a greater degree than during World War I), nevertheless it was touched by the war and made its contribution to the Allied war effort. The Middle East as a whole was an area of geostrategic importance to the combatants, serving as a landbridge from Europe to Africa and Asia, and was the scene of heavy fighting in North and East Africa.

⁹⁵L/P&S/12/3727, T.C. Fowle, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, to J.C. Walton, India Office, 18 Jan. 1938; copy in CAB/104/71.

⁹⁶CAB/104/71, Record of an informal discussion held at the India Office on 14 April 1938; L/P&S/12/3727, W.A. Coryton, Air Ministry, to R.T. Peel, India Office, 3 May 1938; and CAB/104/71, CID, Overseas Defence Committee, "Persian Gulf: Defence Schemes for the Arab Side," ODC Minute 344, 14 June 1939.

⁹⁷CAB/104/71, H. Weightman, Office of the PRPG, to Air Vice Marshal C.L. Courtney, AOC British Forces in Iraq, 4 Aug. 1938.

⁹⁸L/P&S/12/3727, CID, Oil Board, Minutes of 36th Meeting, 11 April 1938. The other two sources were Trinidad and Rangoon. It was not surprising, then, that the visit of a Japanese supply ship to Bahrain in February 1938 was regarded as an attempt to gain knowledge of the precise location of the oilfields and refinery for an attack. L/P&S/12/3727, CID, Oil Board, "The Importance of Oil Supplies from Bahrein," Paper OB 245, Mar. 1938.

⁹⁹L/P&S/12/3727, various correspondence.

Hostilities in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf were rare, but the region also held importance for the Allies. First, the Arabian Peninsula and its surrounding bodies of water, the Gulf and the Red Sea, provided the air and sea gateways to the areas East-of-Suez: the Indian Ocean, Asia, and the Pacific. Second, the Peninsula served as a "base" or "staging post" for operations elsewhere, providing facilities for the air routes and naval convoys to the Far East, playing a role in the Italian East Africa campaign, being used for the resupply of the Soviet Union through Iran, and serving as a major oil source.

At the same time, the countries of the Peninsula itself were becoming intrinsically more important. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs noted in 1943 that "Friendly relations with Ibn Saud are a matter of particular importance to His Majesty's Government, both because the former's influence as keeper of the shrine at Mecca, with the large Moslem population in India and in other parts of the British Empire, and because of Saudi Arabia's proximity to the sea route to India."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, he added that "The position of the Yemen on the route to India and on the northern boundary of the Aden Protectorate makes it an interest of His Majesty's Government that no potentially hostile Power should acquire a dominant position in that country."¹⁰¹ Finally, he added that "It is of great importance that no international or inter-Arab rivalries should disturb the existing peaceful conditions [in the Arab Gulf states] and thus impede the development of the oil resources of the area," or existing air communications.¹⁰²

Far Eastern Reinforcement, ASW, and Convoy Escort

Several wartime functions utilized the Arabian Peninsula from the beginning of the war. One of these was reinforcement of the Far Eastern theatre, following the route (in 1941-1942) from the UK through Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, Habbaniya (Baghdad), Basra, Sharjah, Karachi, Allahabad, Calcutta, Mingaladon (Rangoon), Victoria Point, and Singapore.¹⁰³ A variant route via Wadi Seidna (Sudan), Aden, and Karachi, placed in operation slightly later, was of particular use to the US Army Air Force.¹⁰⁴

Along with aerial reinforcement, the RAF was tasked with convoy escort duties for the duration of the war. At first, the British were concerned with Italian attacks on convoys in the Red

¹⁰⁰CAB/104/228, War Cabinet, W.P. (43) 301, "British Policy in the Middle East," Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 12 July 1943.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³S. Woodburn Kirby *et al.*, *The War Against Japan*, Vol. 1 (*History of the Second World War*, U.K. Military Series, ed. by J.R.M. Butler; London: HMSO, 1957), p. 253n4.

¹⁰⁴The USAAF directed between 10 and 70 aircraft monthly along this route during 1942-1943, while RAF usage was significant only between Dec. 1942 and Mar. 1943. AIR/24/2, Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book, 1940-1943.

Sea, and after the Italian declaration of war and the fall of France in June 1940, naval and aerial convoy escorts were increased throughout the Arabian Sea. Between June and December 1940, the RAF provided air escort to 54 convoys, with only one ship sunk.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the southern shores of the Peninsula were utilized for overseas reconnaissance and anti-submarine (ASW) operations. From 1939, a GR/FB squadron based at Aden was responsible for ASW in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.¹⁰⁶ Regular anti-submarine patrols were carried out by the RAF's Wellingtons from Khormaksar (Aden), Socotra Island, and Masira Island, and sometimes from Riyan (Aden Protectorate). Catalina flying boats were employed from bases on Socotra and at Aden, as well as Bandar Qasim and Scuisuiban (Somalia) and Salala (Dhufar).¹⁰⁷

Aden's Role in the East African Campaign

Aden Air Command also played an important role in the campaign against the Italians in East Africa, providing patrols over the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Over the course of the campaign, its aircraft successfully attacked Italian supply, fuel and ammunition depots, the airfields at Assab and Dessie, the railway through Diredawa, and then installations in the Addis Ababa area.¹⁰⁸ The Anglo-Italian rivalry in the Red Sea and East Africa had been simmering for several decades and the Red Sea was seen as a potentially major theatre of operations. Fortress Aden was a particularly obvious target, as was Perim, for its value in blocking the Bab al-Mandab Strait and thereby cutting off movement through the Red Sea.¹⁰⁹ The importance of Aden in the early stages of the war was stressed by the Senior Naval Officer in the Red Sea in 1940, who wrote that

As our forces in the Middle East grow, so does their absolute dependence on our convoys, and those depend absolutely on security and adequacy of Aden as a naval and air base. I submit a little clear thinking on the part of the Axis would show them that Aden is key to Middle East, and once that is realised, Aden will be untenable – unless adequate fighter and bomber forces and anti-

¹⁰⁵Three Italian submarines were captured or sunk, another was grounded, and the remaining four were recalled to Bordeaux in May 1941. All seven Italian destroyers were put out of action by Apr. 1941. Thereupon, the Red Sea was removed as a "combat zone" until the arrival of German and Japanese submarines in 1944. See S.W. Roskill, "Naval Operations in the Red Sea, 1940-41," *JRUSI*, Vol. 102, No. 602 (May 1957), pp. 211-215.

¹⁰⁶CAB/80/4, COS (39) Memorandum 95, "Long Range Reconnaissance in the Indian Ocean, Note by the Chief of the Air Staff," 10 Oct. 1939. The entire Arabian Sea coast, from Perim to Sharjah, was turned over to Aden in November 1943. AIR/24/2, Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book (1940-1943), Nov. 1943.

¹⁰⁷AIR/23/1151, Minutes of conference held at HQ, RAF, ME, on GR Bases in Aden Command, 25 Sept. 1944; and AIR/24/2, Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book (1944-1945), Oct. 1944.

¹⁰⁸I.S.O. Playfair *et al.*, *The Mediterranean and Middle East (History of the Second World War, U.K. Military Series, ed. by J.R.M. Butler; London: HMSO, 1957)*, Vol. 1, p. 420; and CAB/21/1033, "Despatch of Middle East Air Operations," by Air Chief Marshal Sir A.M. Longmore, C-in-C, RAF Middle East, 1 Feb. 1941.

¹⁰⁹A 1937 evaluation of the Italian threat noted that Perim was vulnerable to shelling from Massawa and attack by either submarines or boats. AIR/2/2138, AOC British Forces in Aden, to the Secretary of State for Air, 8 Sept. 1937.

aircraft defences are provided covering aerodromes, the port and outer harbour. The AOC agrees that it is only through supineness and false strategy of enemy that Aden is able to fulfil its task.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, Aden's defenses at the outbreak of the war were extremely modest. These consisted of three RAF squadrons (one bomber, one fighter, and one reconnaissance), one Indian Infantry battalion and approximately 500 Aden Levies.¹¹¹ Naval facilities at Aden consisted of a cruise and light craft base, with docking, repair, and maintenance facilities, an armament depot and important fuel storage. In late 1942, Aden became a fuelling base for aircraft carriers and capital ships. Air operations were centered at nearby Khormaksar, although the landing ground at al-Shaykh 'Uthman was also pressed into service. Aerodromes for reconnaissance and ferrying operations were also established at Riyan (near Mukalla), Socotra Island, and Bandar Qasim (on the British Somaliland coast).¹¹²

The principal Italian threat to Aden was through bombing raids. Aden Colony was hit on at least 12 occasions between September 1940 and February 1941, Perim 3 times, and Kamaran Island and al-Shaykh Sa'id (on the North Yemeni mainland) at least once.¹¹³ The Gulf also received a raid in October 1940, when three or four Italian bombers took off from Rhodes, dropped their bombs on the Bahrain refinery without causing any damage, and flew on to Eritrea. Another bomber caused slight damage to the oil pipelines near Dhahran.¹¹⁴

Italy lost little time after entering the war in June 1940 to mount an offensive in East Africa. In July, the Italians moved from Eritrea into Sudan and soon after occupied British Somaliland. The British counterattack from Sudan and Kenya had to be delayed until forces had been built up. Nevertheless, the attack mounted from Kenya on Italian Somaliland in February 1941 was surprisingly effective and British troops were able to enter southern Ethiopia only a month later. They were bolstered by other forces moving inland from Berbera, which had been captured in mid-March. Emperor Haile Selassie was able to return to his capital at Addis Ababa in early April. Meanwhile, British forces entering Eritrea from the Sudan in January faced stiffer resistance and it

¹¹⁰CAB/80/21, COS (40), Memorandum No. 900, 4 Nov. 1940, SNO Red Sea to C-in-C East Indies, 30 October 1940 (telegram). In his covering telegram to C-in-C Middle East, the C-in-C East Indies added that "The strength of forces in Egypt and Mediterranean Fleet rests ultimately on flow of supplies through Red Sea. The flow will be most seriously interrupted and reduced if facilities of Aden are denied to use or our shipping collected there suffers much damage." Ibid.

¹¹¹CAB/79/1, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Minutes of 53rd Meeting, 20 Oct. 1939. RAF capabilities at Aden were later supplemented by units in Sudan and the South African Air Force in Kenya. Roskill, "Naval Operations in the Red Sea," p. 212.

¹¹²CAB/80/36, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Memorandum No. 280, "Defence Plan for the Gulf of Aden," 28 May 1942. The strategic importance of Socotra, despite its lack of a harbor and isolation during monsoons, was stressed as "it commands the entrance to the Gulf of Aden and is a focal point in the maintenance of our sea communications with the Middle East, Persian Gulf and India."

¹¹³AIR/24/2, Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book (1940-1943).

¹¹⁴CAB/21/1033, "Despatch of Middle East Air Operations," by Air Chief Marshall Sir A.M. Longmore, C-in-C, RAF Middle East, 1 Feb. 1941; and R/15/2/669, Political Agent, Bahrain, to PRPG, 19 Oct. 1940.

took until early April before Asmara and the port of Massawa were captured. The main body of Italian troops, caught in a pincer between advancing British forces, were forced to surrender in May, although pockets of resistance continued to hold out around Gondar until late November. The Italian defeat in East Africa greatly reduced the threat to Red Sea operations and allowed the transfer of the bulk of British troops to Egypt.¹¹⁵

While the RAF in Aden provided air reconnaissance for Red Sea shipping during this campaign, its major contribution was in bombing raids in conjunction with the offensives on Italian-held territory from north and south. Repeated raids were made on Assab, Dessie, Diredawa, Addis Ababa, Alomata and Makalle. In addition, sorties were made against the Diredawa aerodrome in support of the attack on enemy-held Berbera in March. During April, operations were carried out almost entirely in the Dessie area and on the Assab-Dessie road, as well as attacks on the aerodromes at Dessie and Assab. The success of the East African campaign allowed the removal of one of the bomber squadrons to Egypt, leaving a bomber squadron, a reconnaissance squadron, and part of a fighter squadron in Aden.¹¹⁶

The Gulf Supply Route to the Soviet Union

The threat on the western side of the Peninsula was soon followed by a threat to the north and east. Forces were required in 1941 to put down pro-Axis governments in both Iraq and Persia, and then in 1942 the German advance into the Soviet Union raised the possibility of a Nazi breakthrough to the Middle East and a threat to India. The principal role of the Persia and Iraq Command, established in 1942, however, was to maintain the southern supply route to the Soviet Union.

The development of unexpected threats to this particular region led to a certain amount of command confusion, which lasted throughout much of the war. Although the AOC Iraq reported to the AOC-in-C Middle East during the early stages of the war, there was increasing pressure to transfer jurisdiction to the Senior Air Officer in India, since the command had little connection with the North African campaign, and the troops assigned for the defense of Persia and Iraq came from India.¹¹⁷ The matter was further confused in November 1941, when the AOC Iraq, under the general

¹¹⁵A summary of the campaign is contained in CAB/106/626, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, AOC-in-C, RAF Middle East, to the Secretary of State for Air, 24 Nov. 1941. See also B.H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), pp. 121-127; and MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 150-157.

¹¹⁶CAB/106/626, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, AOC-in-C, RAF Middle East, to the Secretary of State for Air, 24 Nov. 1941. Summaries of these raids and reconnaissance sorties are contained in AIR/24/2, Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book (1940-1943). The total strength of air force personnel in the Aden Command, as noted in the Jan. 1943 report, was 184 officers and 2308 other ranks.

¹¹⁷See the deliberations of the War Cabinet's Subcommittee on the Control of Air Forces in Iraq (1941) in CAB/95/6. The Air Ministry resisted the change and the argument that India was not prepared at that time to provide aircraft and supplies for these forces carried the day. While the Chiefs of Staff Committee seconded this decision,

direction of the AOC-in-C Middle East, was given responsibility for control of air forces and facilities in Iraq, the Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula (excluding Aden), and part of Persia. In addition, operational control of land forces was transferred from the C-in-C India to the C-in-C Middle East at the beginning of 1942. Soon after, the region was divided into separate Middle East and Persia & Iraq Commands.¹¹⁸

From a small start, British and Indian forces were gradually built up in the area under the jurisdiction of the Persia and Iraq Command. Some of these had been moved into Iraq after the Rashid 'Ali coup in early 1941. The coup had raised the specter of an Iraqi-Axis alliance and led to direct hostilities, including an attack by the Iraqi Army on the RAF Station at Habbaniya, its defeat and a subsequent British drive to recapture Baghdad, 30 miles away.¹¹⁹ Other units were brought in during the latter half of 1942 to meet a potential German advance in Syria and to provide assistance if necessary to Soviet forces in the Caucasus. With secure control over the local governments and the disappearance of the German threat to the Soviet Union, many of these troops were moved out to more urgent theatres.

A renewed but unsuccessful effort to place Iraq under India was made in 1943. At that time, the duties of AOC Iraq and Persia were defined as: (1) internal security of Iraq and Persia; (2) administrative duties in connection with the line of communication from the Gulf to Russia; (3) administrative duties in connection with the line of communication from Iraq to India; (4) the defense of the Abadan oilfields; and (5) reconnaissance responsibilities in the Gulf.¹²⁰ Due to the reduced threat to Iraq and Persia, RAF installations at Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, Mehrabad, and Abadan were disbanded, while Basra was reduced in status, and surplus manpower was sent to Egypt. The stations at Masira and Ra's al-Hadd, which had been under Iraq's control since establishment of the Basra-Aden air route, were transferred to British Forces, Aden, in recognition of their primary role in anti-submarine patrols.¹²¹

Meanwhile, the decision was made in August 1941 to transfer supplies to the Soviet Union along the difficult route through Iraq and Persia. The task involved the expansion of existing ports, the construction of a new port (located on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border at Umm Qasr and dismantled for

General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief India, made the point that "sooner or later the air forces in Iraq must come under the control of India." CAB/79/14, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, COS (41) 3 19th Meeting, 10 Sept. 1941.

¹¹⁸WO/106/5824, various correspondence.

¹¹⁹See Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since 1932* (London: Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1951), pp. 182-205; and Great Britain, Central Office of Information, *PAIFORCE: The Official Story of the Persia and Iraq Command, 1941-1946* (London: HMSO, 1948), pp. 14-43.

¹²⁰AIR/23/1045, "Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Main Organisation Conference held at Air Command Post," n.d. (ca. Oct. 1943). At the same time, a suggestion was made to integrate the Aden and East African commands but rejected, although the rank of their AOCs was downgraded.

¹²¹AIR/23/1091 and AIR/23/1139, various correspondence.

political reasons at the end of the war),¹²² building bridges across the region's rivers, and laying railroad tracks north to the Soviet border, as well as the erection of assembly plants for trucks, airplanes, and other war materiel. In addition to supplies, the trans-Persian route was also utilized to repatriate freed Russian prisoners of war and – in a reversal of the normal flow – to move exiled Polish soldiers and civilians from Turkistan to Bandar Pahlavi on their way to points west.

By the time, the transport of supplies to the Soviet Union ceased in 1945, over 5 million tons had been shipped.¹²³ The supply effort was not entirely British, of course, and American involvement began in August 1942, with the creation of the Persian Gulf Command within US Armed Forces in the Middle East. Approximately one-quarter of all wartime aid shipped from the Western Hemisphere to the Soviet Union passed through the Gulf route, slightly more than the amount sent around the North Cape to Murmansk.¹²⁴

The South Arabian Air Route

The last role played by the Peninsula in World War II came with the turnabout of Allied fortunes in Europe and the channeling of increased efforts to the war in the Pacific. In December 1943, the Air Ministry began to develop a chain of airfields from the UK to India to facilitate the transfer of reinforcement aircraft and personnel to the Far Eastern theatre. A number of these airfields lay in the purview of RAF Mediterranean/Middle East (MEDME), including Castel Benito, Marble Arch, El Adem, Cairo West, Almaza, Lydda, H.E., Habbaniya, Shaibah, Bahrain and Sharjah. Although these fields had been established some time previously, the majority required major construction work to handle the increased flow of aircraft. This work included the laying of runways, construction of technical facilities and the erection of accommodation for permanent and transit personnel. Trooping began with twin-engined Dakotas with four-engined aircraft added later, allowing a monthly total of 12,000 troops to be transported by October 1945.¹²⁵

¹²²On the Umm Qasr port and its political ramifications for Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations, see J.E. Peterson, "The Islands of Arabia: Their Recent History and Strategic Importance," *Arabian Studies*, Vol. 7 (1985), pp. 23-35; and Daniel Silverfarb, "The British Government and the Question of Umm Qasr, 1938-1945," *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (July 1982), pp. 215-238.

¹²³A complete account of the supply route is contained in Great Britain, *PAIFORCE*.

¹²⁴T.H. Vail Motter, *The Middle East Theatre: The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia (United States Army in World War II)*; Washington: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1952), Appendix A. An anecdotal account by a participant in the US effort in Iraq and Persia is contained in Joel Sayre, *Persian Gulf Command: Some Marvels on the Road to Kazvin* (New York: Random House, 1945).

¹²⁵AIR/23/1051, "Report on the Redeployment and Reorganisation of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean and Middle East, 2 May to 16 Oct. 1945." In another indication of usage, Bahrain recorded 115 landings by RAF reinforcement aircraft and 109 by RAF transport aircraft between 15 Nov. and 30 Dec. 1944. AIR/23/1147, RAF Station Bahrain (1943-1946).

Since the route through the Fertile Crescent was considered vulnerable in the early stages of the war, an alternative route via Sudan and Aden to Karachi was sketched out in mid-1941, with stops at Aden, Riyan, Salala, Masira, Ra's al-Hadd, and Jiwani (India). Construction of necessary facilities was carried out at these locations throughout 1942. Nevertheless, at that stage in the war, it was thought that this route would be left for emergency use only.¹²⁶ However, the South Arabian air route began to acquire additional importance with the German invasion of North Africa and the American airlifts from the Western Hemisphere across West and Central Africa and then along the South Arabian route to India. Extensive use of the South Arabian route was made in the latter stages of the war, for the ferrying of aircraft and troop transport. While the USAAF made the most use of the route, RAF activities (in conjunction with convoy escort and ASW duties) were also prominent, as were BOAC and Pan Am flights.

POSTWAR REASSESSMENTS

The majority of the frenzied military activity in and around the Arabian Peninsula faded away with the end of the war. The bases, airfields, and cooperation of the area's governments lost their immediate importance. Nevertheless, the Peninsula did not return to its prewar status of isolation. Postwar political changes in the British empire, oil, the emergence of American interest in the Gulf, and the perception of a Soviet threat on the horizon all continued to make Arabia a region of continuing strategic importance.

Wind-Down and Peacetime Footing

While the war provided the stimulus for the creation of the South Arabian air route, its use did not end with the Japanese surrender. Troops were ferried back from the Pacific along its points as late as March 1946.¹²⁷ British reluctance to quit the route was based principally on its value as part of a worldwide rapid reinforcement network.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the transition from wartime to peacetime use was marked by several complications.

One issue to be settled was future civilian use. Both BOAC and Pan Am, in the service of their respective governments, had made extensive use of the route during the war. BOAC had instituted a weekly service along the route in 1943 when it seemed that the Middle East was in danger of collapse; the service was retained later primarily because Britain did not wish to leave sole

¹²⁶R/15/6/80-85, various correspondence.

¹²⁷The number of troop transports using the route was recorded at 11 eastbound and 2 westbound in Jan. 1946, 37 eastbound and 25 westbound in Feb., and 2 eastbound and 25 westbound in Mar. None were recorded in Apr. or May. AIR/24/1678, AHQ Aden, Operations Records Books (1946).

¹²⁸David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Territories, 1945-1972* (London: HMSO, 1980), p. 15.

use of the route in American hands. BOAC officials were even stationed in several stations during this period.¹²⁹ Following the war, BOAC maintained a Cairo-Karachi service until mid-February 1947, dropping it for commercial reasons.¹³⁰ With BOAC's withdrawal, use on the route was limited to charter flights by a variety of operators, which continued into the early 1950s.¹³¹ Aden itself was served, from October 1949, by Aden Airways, a BOAC subsidiary which provided service on BOAC's former Red Sea routes.¹³²

The lack of sufficient civilian use, particularly after BOAC pulled out, led to a refusal by the new Ministry of Civil Aviation to pay for the continued staffing of the airfields. RAF reluctance to pick up the expenses was outweighed by its desire to keep the airfields ready for future contingency use. As a consequence, nearly all the airfields were reduced to a care-and-maintenance basis or abandoned during the late 1940s.¹³³

Socotra was completely closed down. A landing ground had been built on the island early in 1940, abandoned during the Italian threat, and then resurrected in 1942 and used for the rest of the war for anti-submarine patrols and convoy escorts. However, its isolation, long monsoon season, and lack of a harbor rendered it unsuitable for strategic requirements after the war. Riyan, just outside Mukalla in the Eastern Aden Protectorate, had been important for ferrying, ASW, and escorting throughout nearly all the war. With the end of hostilities, Riyan was reduced to care-and-maintenance status, and was used by infrequent civil aircraft as an emergency landing ground and also by the RAF, who maintained it for its utility in operations in the Protectorate until final withdrawal in the mid-1960s.

The situation regarding Salala and Masira was more complicated, since they were located in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. The facilities had expanded from emergency landing grounds in the 1930s to extensive wartime bases – the wartime population of Masira exceeded 700, including British, Americans, Indians, Baluch, and Pathans, and Omanis from Muscat; this does not count the

¹²⁹L/P&S/12/3928, various correspondence. The British Overseas Airways Corporation was established on 24 Nov. 1939, with the board members being appointed by HMG, which held all stock. BOAC operated during the war as a service of the government, which financed its operations and determined its traffic. R/15/6/85, statement by A.W. Street, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Air, 23 Aug. 1942.

¹³⁰Stages along this route were Cairo, Luxor, Wadi Halfa, Khartoum, Asmara, Aden, Riyan, Salala, Masira, and Karachi. R/15/6/85, BOAC timetable for 27 Nov. 1946. A new weekly service was begun in early 1947 through the Gulf, with a stop at Bahrain. R/15/6/109, India Office to PRPG, 22 Mar. 1947.

¹³¹For example, approximately 26 charter flights were recorded during the period between early 1948 and May 1949. Operators included Mistry Airways (later India Overseas), Air Ceylon, Ethiopian Airlines, Chartair, Vickers, Petroleum Concessions Ltd., Indamer, and even Alaska Airlines. R/15/6/92-93, L/P&S/12/2058, and AIR/28/1077, various correspondence.

¹³²An account of the early years of this operation is contained in "Aden Airways," *Port of Aden Annual 1952-53* (Letchworth, Herts., 1954).

¹³³Information on the status of the various airfields is obtainable in a number of Air Ministry files, particularly the Aden Command record books (AIR/24) and the appropriate station record books (AIR/28). See also AIR/20/7140, AIR/23/1120-1121, AIR/23/1147-1148, and AIR/23/1151.

tribal population, most of which had departed.¹³⁴ This explosion in size and function had been negotiated with the sultan on a wartime basis and transition to peacetime usage was problematic, apart from the negotiation of a civil air agreement. The proposal had been raised in 1944 for outright purchase of Masira, or its exchange for the nearby Kuriya Muriya Islands (a crown possession since 1854) – but these ideas were eventually rejected. Both RAF stations were put on care-and-maintenance status, along with Riyan, in April 1946. In later years, the importance of Masira increased with its inclusion in East-of-Suez staging schemes, and both it and Salala were instrumental in fighting the Dhufari rebels in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁵

Continued utilization of Khormaksar, on the other hand, was never in doubt, since it was situated within Aden Colony and provided a necessary component in the defense of Aden and the Protectorate as well as an important link in the strategic route to the Far East. The landing ground at al-Shaykh ‘Uthman had been established in 1936 and it was utilized during the war as a staging post for ferrying operations, being used primarily by the USAAF since 1943. After the war, it was reduced to care-and-maintenance basis and then, because of its satellite status to nearby Khormaksar and location in the territory of the Sultan of Lahj, was completely abandoned at the end of 1947.

Similar arrangements had been made with the RAF facilities along the Arab Gulf littoral. Regular use of the aerodrome at Muharraq in Bahrain was retained, partly because the PRPG moved his headquarters to Bahrain in 1947 and partly because of increasing regular civil use. Sharjah was reduced to a care-and-maintenance basis after the war but figured more importantly with the Buraimi crisis of the early 1950s, the rebellion in Oman in the mid-1950s, and the British withdrawal from Iraq in 1958.

Emergence of Anglo-American Rivalry

As noted at various places above, Allied military involvement in the Peninsula during the war included American forces as well as British. This was particularly true for the resupply of the Soviet Union through the Gulf, and in ferrying and transport operations to the Far East through the Gulf and South Arabia. The British cocoon around the Peninsula had been pierced earlier by American oil companies but the war allowed far more significant American penetration, including official representatives in Dhahran, and raised British suspicions that American involvement in the region, once raised, would be permanent.

In the Gulf, the US held an airfield at Abadan in Iran, in connection with the Persian Gulf Command, and made use of airfields at Habbaniya, Basra, and Shaiba in Iraq for reinforcement activities, as well as Bahrain and Sharjah.¹³⁶ In return for provision of some rifles, machine guns,

¹³⁴Peterson, "Islands of Arabia."

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶FO/371/42607, Air Ministry, S4 (C.S.), "Airfields Conspectus relating to American War-time Occupation (or Use) of Airfields and Bases in British Territory and British Spheres of Influence," 18 August 1944 (draft).

and lorries to the ruler of Muscat, the US was granted permission to use facilities and erect buildings at Salala, Masira, and Ra's al-Hadd, and to station aircraft formations at those places.¹³⁷

Along the South Arabian route, the US Transport Command took over formal control of the RAF station at al-Shaykh 'Uthman in the summer of 1943, and incurred considerable expense in improving the facilities, granted for use as long as the airfield was required as a main staging post for reinforcing. The British, however, were careful to make sure that RAF personnel remained continuously at the station and to reserve the right to take over again in case of military necessity. The United States also established transport and reinforcement facilities at Perim Island, Riyan, Salala, and Masira. Minor construction was undertaken at Riyan, but at Salala the US built an administration building, domestic accommodation, and a bulk petrol installation.¹³⁸

These facilities were granted with great reluctance by the British, who jealously guarded their exclusive presence in this sphere of influence. Establishment of an Pan American Airways service between Khartoum and Karachi (under a direct contract with the US War Department for carrying military personnel and cargo), the stationing of Pan Am personnel at Masira and Salala, and Pan Am carriage of US mail instead of BOAC, were all strongly resisted, for fear of granting de facto postwar rights along the route.¹³⁹

The British also resisted an American presence along the Arab littoral in the Gulf. While HMG permitted the stationing of an American naval observer in Bahrain briefly in early 1941, a request for a consulate there was turned down by the India Office, fearing the effect it would have on requests by other, particularly Arab, states.¹⁴⁰ The RAF also chafed over USAAF use of the Muharraq aerodrome, charging that the heavier US aircraft caused considerable damage to the runways, and attempted to ban their use. While the US prevented this, pointing out that Bahrain was the only suitable airport between Karachi and Abadan, it began to search for its own airfields in nearby Saudi Arabia.¹⁴¹ When in 1944 the US asked for additional facilities in Sharjah, the British agreed to provide the landing grounds and necessary buildings but decided to construct them to American requirements, rather than allow the US to build and thus establish a permanent position there.¹⁴²

¹³⁷FO/371/32385, PRPG to the Secretary of State for India, 17 Aug. 1942.

¹³⁸FO/371/42607, Air Ministry, S4 (C.S.), "Airfields Conspectus relating to American War-time Occupation (or Use) of Airfields and Bases in British Territory and British Spheres of Influence," 18 Aug. 1944 (draft).

¹³⁹FO/371/32385, various correspondence. With perhaps a tinge of irony, the Political Agent's Muscat Intelligence Summary for 16-30 June 1944 noted that the sultan preferred to travel by American aircraft rather than BOAC, perhaps because the Americans carried him for free while BOAC charged him. L/P&S/12/2039.

¹⁴⁰FO/371/34093, E.W.R. Lumby, India Office, to A.A. Dudley, Foreign Office, 10 Sept. 1943.

¹⁴¹AIR/23/1147, various correspondence.

¹⁴²FO/371/42607, Sir James Ross, Air Ministry, to Engineer in Chief, War Office, 8 Aug. 1944.

One effect of these suspicions of American inroads in a British preserve was the American choice to seek suitable installations in Saudi Arabia, thereby contributing to the undermining of British influence in that country. Faced with the first request in March 1944, Britain at first advised the Saudi king to grant permission only for the duration of the war, and then only for military use. But by the time the US air base was finally completed at Dhahran, the war had ended and US civil carriers began to operate from its runways. The British defeat was not limited to the Dhahran airfield, but also encompassed the Saudi government's rejection of British military equipment and training teams in favor of American ones.¹⁴³ The ascendancy of American influence in Riyadh at the expense of the British position prompted the bitter remark of His Majesty's ambassador in 1952 that "practically the only thing we now have to offer the Saudis is diplomatic advice, and such show of force as we can muster is on the whole antipathetic to them. The Americans on the other hand have luxury, wealth and modernisation to offer and their show of force is in general considered beneficial to Saudi Arabia."¹⁴⁴

Strategic Planning for a New Enemy

With the imminent defeat of the Axis powers, British strategic planning turned to postwar responsibilities and interests. The Middle East was seen as a region of continuing importance to the British empire in the postwar era, just as it had been for the previous three decades.

"The Middle East is ... a region of life-and-death consequences for Britain and the British Empire in four ways: (a) as an indispensable channel of communications between the Empire's Western, Eastern and Southern territories; (b) as a strategic centre, control of which would enable an enemy to disrupt and destroy a considerable part of the British Imperial system and to deprive Britain herself of many supports and resources essential to her status and influence as a major power; (c) as the Empire's main reservoir of mineral oil; (d) as a region in which British political method must make good, if the British way of life is to survive. The vital importance of these four considerations has been established by hard experience in both world wars."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³The British side of this topic is covered in CAB/80/93, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Memorandum 203, "American Proposal for Building a Military Airfield at Dhahran, Note by the Chief of the Air Staff," 23 Mar. 1945; and in the correspondence in FO/371/75525 and R/15/2/523. On the origins of the US military involvement with Saudi Arabia, see Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁴FO/371/98828, G.C. Pelham, Jidda, to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 17 Dec. 1952.

¹⁴⁵CAB/104/228, Middle Eastern Defence Committee, "Imperial Security in the Middle East," undated (ca. late May 1945). This opinion seconded the view advanced in 1942 that "Our particular interests in the Middle East may be defined in general terms as communications and oil, though it is probable that other important economic interests might be brought to light." CAB/95/1, War Cabinet, Middle East Official Committee, Military Subcommittee, Memorandum M.S.C. (42) 3, "Post-War Strategic Requirements – Middle East," undated. For a detailed discussion of British policy in the Middle East following World War II, with emphasis on the pivotal role of Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary in the Labour Government of 1945-1951) in determining that policy, see William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

Along with Western Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, and India, the Middle East was considered as a strategic area where continued British influence was necessary in order to defend adequately the four cornerstones of British interests in the UK, the American continent, southern Africa, and Australia.¹⁴⁶

Major reviews of British defense planning in 1946 revolved around the principal threat of potential war with the Soviet Union. In this scenario, the Middle East's importance increased, both because of the assumption that the Soviet Union continued to desire expansion southward into the region and because the Middle East offered the only base from which to attack vital Soviet industrial and oil-producing areas. In case of war, then, it was deemed to be of great strategic importance to hold the Middle East in order: (1) not to prejudice the security of the UK, the other main support areas of the Commonwealth and the communications between them; (2) to retain the necessary air bases from which to assume the offensive and attack areas vital to the enemy; (3) to secure essential oil supplies; and (4) to deny to the Soviet Union the means of securing its most vulnerable flank and also of establishing a formidable base from which to attack the main British support areas.¹⁴⁷

Wartime requirements to defend the communications routes and the vital oil supplies of the northern Gulf from a Soviet advance were seen to include operational naval bases at Alexandria and Aden, with advanced bases at Tobruk, Haifa, Port Sudan, Bahrain and Masira Island. Land forces would be concentrated in Palestine, with reserve formations in Egypt. Egypt would be central to air forces, both to defend Egypt and its communications and to provide bases for the strategic bomber force, while air forces in Palestine would support land operations.

In order to fulfill these wartime requirements, peacetime requirements revolved around maintaining a predominant British political position in the Middle East, to keep the Arab world out of the Soviet orbit, while placing a minimum nucleus of military forces there. Ideally, these would include: naval forces based on Malta, Aden, and Ceylon; the use of Palestine as the core of land defenses, with a strategic reserve based in either Kenya or Cyrenaica; and fighter forces based in Palestine and Cyrenaica, from where they could be moved forward to Egypt in an emergency, and strategic bomber forces based in Cyrenaica.¹⁴⁸ Iraq, with its RAF bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba, would naturally prove important in defending British oil assets.

The difficulty with Iraq, as it was to prove elsewhere in the Middle East, was that existing base arrangements were becoming increasingly unpalatable to Arab governments.¹⁴⁹ Already by 1947, Egypt had to be removed from planning for peacetime deployments. As the fighting grew more intense in Palestine, that area's usefulness decreased, and of course disappeared completely

¹⁴⁶CAB/2 1/2086, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, J.P. (46) 45 (Revised Final), "Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth, Report by the J.P.S.," 31 Mar. 1946. For an analysis of the American view of the new Soviet threat, see Bruce Robellet Kuniho Im, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁴⁷CAB/21/2086, Cabinet, Defence Committee, D.O. (46) 80, "British Strategic Requirements in the Middle East, Report by the Chiefs of Staff," 18 June 1946.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹CAB/21/2086, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Staff, J.P. (47) 130, "Middle East – Brief for Discussion," 26 Sept. 1947.

with the independence of Israel in 1948. Aden, long assigned to a marginal role because of its geographic isolation and great distance from the rest of the Middle Eastern theatre, began to assume increasing strategic significance as other locations were denied to the British.

The Middle East continued to be of central importance to the RAF, as it already had been long before the war.¹⁵⁰ In the latter stages of the war, it was considered that

The Middle East would always be the station for a permanent powerful Air Force, because of the necessity for a secure hold there in the general scheme of Imperial security. This necessity arises not only from the importance of the Imperial lines of communication through, and British interests in, the theatre, but also from the fact that the Middle East is an ideal base for the positioning of strategic air power reserves, which can be moved east or west as required....¹⁵¹

At the end of the war, the AHQs in the Middle East were Eastern Mediterranean, British Forces in Aden, East Africa, Iraq and Persia, Levant, Egypt, with an additional RAF Station in Khartoum.¹⁵² Yet the RAF was not to escape the same problems of relocation as other British forces in the Middle East faced during the postwar era.

At the same time, it became increasingly clear that anticipated British wartime objectives in the Middle East could not be realized without American assistance. "Even allowing for the timely arrival of the Americans, it might still not be possible to hold the oil-fields at the head of the Persian Gulf.... We consider, therefore, that it should be a definite part of our policy to associate the United States in the defence of the Middle East oil-fields...."¹⁵³ Cooperation between the UK and the US in the Arabian Peninsula became more evenhanded as Britain was forced to seek American assistance in acquiring permission for contingency use of Saudi facilities. Still, the fear that granting the US military rights in the Gulf and southern Arabia would lead to a sharing of political control was almost impossible to suppress.¹⁵⁴ The one concession that Britain made was to allow the homeporting of the US Navy's small Middle East Force in Bahrain, beginning in 1949.

The era between the world wars had firmly established the Arabian Peninsula within the orbit of British influence. In three short decades, the Peninsula had acquired central strategic importance to Britain for its communications routes and oil, and had further proved its value during World War II. Yet by the end of this short period, British ability to control the Peninsula and the neighboring region was already waning. The subsequent era, even shorter at two decades, was marked by a steady decline of British influence in the Middle East and, almost simultaneously, greater reliance on bases in the Peninsula and Gulf and then the abandonment of those facilities. While the interwar

¹⁵⁰In Jan. 1937, out of the 27 RAF squadrons stationed abroad, 14 were in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography*, p. 187.

¹⁵¹AIR/23/1051, Air Chief Marshal Sir Guy Garrod, C-in-C RAF, MEDME, "Report on the Redeployment and Reorganisation of the Royal Air Force in the Mediterranean and Middle East," 15 Oct. 1945.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³CAB/21/2086, Cabinet, Defence Committee, D.O. (46) 80, "British Strategic Requirements in the Middle East, Report by the Chiefs of Staff," 18 June 1946.

¹⁵⁴Discussion of the American role in defending the Arabian Peninsula after the war is contained in CO/537/4131, various correspondence.

period could be termed a time of "air power and empire" in the Arabian Peninsula, British activities in the postwar years were steadily reduced to tidying up the detritus of imperial entanglements.

Table 2.1. Summary of RAF Air Operations at Aden, 1919-1941

Date	Against	Action Taken ^①	Casualties ^②
Nov. 1919	al-Zaraniq tribe (of Yemen)	O	None ^③
Jan. 1922	Imam's forces (opposing)	B	ca. 35 killed
May 1923	Makhdumi and Mansuri tribes	B	None
Feb. 1925	Hukhais tribe	G	None
July-Oct. 1925	Imam's forces (opposing)	G	ca. 79 killed
Aug. 1927	Subayhi tribe	W	None
Sept.-Oct. 1927	Imam's forces	W	None
Feb.-Mar. 1928	Imam's forces (opposing)	B	40+ killed
June-Aug.	Imam's forces (opposing)	B	25 killed 1928; 1 RAF pilot
Jan.-Mar. 1929	Subayhi tribe	B	"not heavy"
May 1931	Ahl Ma'ir tribe	B	None
April 1932	Qutaybi tribe	B	None
Oct. 1933	Imam's forces	O	None
Nov. 1933	Mawsata tribe	B	None
Mar.-May 1934	Qutaybi tribe	B	None
Feb. 1937	Hadrami tribes	B	None
Dec. 1936-Jan. 1937	Mansuri section of Subayhi tribe	O	None
Mar.-Apr. 1937	Shayri tribe	B	None
Sep.-Oct. 1937	Subayhi tribe	B	None
Oct. 1937	Qutaybi tribe	O	None
Dec. 1937	Ahl Haydara and Mansuri section of Subayhi tribe	B	None
Jan. 1938	Sa'ar and Tamini tribes	O	None
Feb. 1938	Hamumi tribe	B	None
Apr. 1938	Subayhi tribe	B	None
July-Sep. 1938	Mansuri section of Subayhi tribe	B	Unknown
Nov. 1938	Lower Yafa'i tribe	O	None
Nov.-Dec. 1938	Imam's forces	O	None
Oct. 1940-Feb. 1941	Qutaybi tribe	B	Unknown

NOTES:

① O = Overflight or no action taken; B = Bombing carried out; G = action taken in support of ground forces; W = warnings dropped only.

② Only one British air casualty was suffered; most casualties incurred by opposing forces occurred in fighting on the ground.

③ Action was taken to free Colonel H.F. Jacob, a British emissary who was taken prisoner by the Zaraniq tribe of Yemen's Tihama region while on his way to see the Imam.

SOURCES:

① AIR/5/1300; Aden Operations Summary, 1919-1938.

② AIR/24/2; Air Staff, AHQ, Aden, Operations Record Book, 1940-1943.

Table 2.2. Air Facilities in Arabian Peninsula, on Eve of World War II

Location:	Extent of Facilities:
Kuwait	aerodrome and flying-boat alighting area for use of RAF and Imperial Airways; 2 landing grounds for emergency use of RAF; occasional use as halt for Imperial Airways
Bahrain	2 aerodromes and 1 flying-boat alighting area for use of RAF and Imperial Airways; RAF depot with a bomb store; Royal Navy base for Persian Gulf Division, with supply of fuel
Yas Island	emergency RAF landing ground; seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Abu Dhabi	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot
Dubai	Imperial Airways seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Sharjah	Imperial Airways landing ground; resthouse; fuel and oil depot; beacon; wireless station
Ra's al-Khayma	seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Kalba	Imperial Airways emergency landing ground; fuel and oil depot; beacon; seaplane moorings and shelter for passengers
Shinas	emergency landing ground with fuel
Suhar	emergency landing ground
Muscat	RAF depot with wireless station; nearby RAF aerodrome at Bayt al-Falaj and seaplane anchorage at Bandar Jissa
Ra's al-Hadd	RAF landing ground
Khawr Jarama	seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Gwadar ^①	aerodrome 12 miles inland, used by RAF, Imperial Airways, Air France, and KLM
Masira Island	seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Umm al-Rasas	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot (Masira Island)
Khawr Gharim	RAF landing ground
Shuwaymiya	RAF landing ground
Mirbat	RAF landing ground; seaplane anchorage; fuel and oil depot
Salala	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot
Qishn	RAF landing ground
Riyan	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot

Location:	Extent of Facilities:
Aden	Aerodromes at Khormaksar (Khawr Maqsar) in Aden Colony and at al-Shaykh 'Uthman nearby
Perim Island	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot; bomb store
Kamaran Island	RAF landing ground; fuel and oil depot
<p><i>Note:</i> ① Gwadar is located on the Makran Coast of what is now Pakistan and not in the Arabian Peninsula. However, it was a possession of the Sultan of Muscat until 1958.</p> <p><i>Sources:</i> L/P&S/12/3727, T.C. Fowle, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, to J.C. Walton, India Office, 18 January 1938; copy in CAB/104/71; L/P&S/20/C252, India General Staff, <i>Military Report and Route Book: The Arabian States of the Persian Gulf, 1939</i> (Simla: Government of India Press, 1940); and AIR/2/2138, "Middle East Re-inforcement Plan, Aden Detail (1937-1939)."</p>	