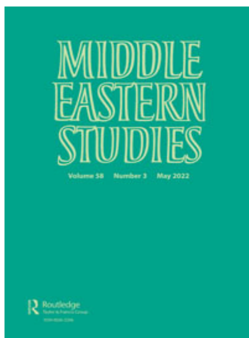

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Anthropologists, Topographers, Diplomats, and Spies: Royal Air Force Intelligence Officers in South Arabia 1954–1959

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> 'Who did you say he was?' The Station Commander turned incredulously towards the Adjutant as he spoke. 'He is an RAF officer sir, an RAFIO, so I wouldn't worry too much about him'.… This 'Arab' was wearing standard pattern K.D. (khaki drill) slacks with a khaki shirt and the badges of rank of a flight lieutenant, but there ended orthodoxy. On his head, he wore the red and white spotted kufiyah of the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion, held jauntily in place by a Bedouin *Iqbal* (black cord of woven goat's hair)……… 'And what is a RAFIO? I think I ought to know since there seems to be one loose on my station'. The Group Captain sounded far from being convinced, 'An RAFIO, sir', said the Adjutant, doing his unsuccessful best to stifle a yawn, 'is an RAF officer who spends his time up-country living with the *bedu* and trying to get intelligence back to HQ BFAP (British Forces Arabian Peninsula). They're a queer lot. Most of them are more Arab than the Arabs. They are not really quite with us as you might say.'[1]

The recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan brought to the fore a wave of studies on counter-insurgency strategy and tactics but also a renewed interest in how Western militaries involved in these campaigns have understood and engaged with the 'human terrain'.[2] Shorthand for communities, societies and groups deemed crucial to establishing the writ of state authority in contested spaces, understanding the social patterns, political eddies, means and modes of economic exchange, as well as religious and cultural identities, has been regarded as integral to the prosecution of effective military operations against insurgents.[3] More broadly, such 'cultural knowledge' increases in importance when the strategic objective is not 'primarily military in nature'; rather it is driven by wider socio-political considerations in which knowledge of the 'other' needs to be fully integrated into military operations if the use of force is to be proportionate to the wider political and social objectives sought.[4]

Of course, the idea of understanding the 'other' is riven with methodological, normative as well as practical concerns. The use by the United States military of anthropologists (as well as the use of quantitative methods) may have been innovative in trying to understand the loyalties, wants, and needs of agrarian-based communities in, for example, Vietnam, but the application of such knowledge did little to obviate the overwhelming use of force that cultural knowledge was either supposed to help focus or indeed mitigate.[5] Equally, the very idea of working with a military organisation has been seen by many anthropologists as anathema, the profession of arms ill-suited to the normative study of peoples whose own agency is too easily denied by conflicts not of their choosing.[6] Accusations of 'essentialising' individuals or groups as an object of study for military purposes carries with it overtones of Orientalism as part of a wider imperial logic, overtones of which can be discerned in the quotation that opens this article.

These debates are not new. Essentialising the 'other' has been at the core of post-Colonial historiography in which subjective understandings (or no understanding at all) has informed the imposition and governance of the Empire. In her excoriating account of British imperialism

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in the Middle East, Priya Satia traced how cultural constructions of Mesopotamia shaped British policy towards Iraq after the First World War. The use of airpower to police Britain's new domains might have been driven by cost – aircraft were cheaper to maintain and had an immediate reach over distance denied large garrisons – but airpower was supplemented across the Middle East by Royal Air Force (RAF) Special Service Officers and other intelligence officials whose knowledge collectively created an episteme. As she notes:

> Their construction of Arabia as a mystical land impervious to visual observation and so full of medieval and biblical romance that existed somewhere beyond the pale of worldly and bourgeois 'convention' both inspired the air control scheme and sustained its acceptability in the face of criticism of its inhumanity. Their presence [intelligence officials] on the ground, gathering intelligence that would facilitate accurate bombardment, also convinced some of the regime's *humanity*.[7]

Such cultural prisms have also been used to critique Western intelligence failures across the Middle East after the Second World War. Dina Rezk produced a detailed study that argued cultural assumptions unduly influenced British and American assessments of Egyptian foreign policy under President Gamal Abdel Nasser and his successor, Anwar Sadat. Studying such assumptions does, of course, move the study of intelligence beyond a fixation with secrecy in offering new methodological insights into how ideas shape perception and action.[8] Even so, we should be wary of being so seduced by understanding intelligence through the cultural lens alone. British and US decision-makers might have got Nasser 'wrong'; equally, Nasser's understanding of Yemen was at fault when he committed his troops to support a new Republican regime following the overthrow of the Imamate in September 1962. Egyptian military appreciations about Yemen and the Yemenis may not have been based on Oriental assumptions, but they proved to be just as biased.[9]

This article examines the progeny of the interwar RAF Special Service Officers: the RAF Intelligence Officers (RAFIOs) who operated in the Aden Protectorates between 1955–1959. It does not disguise they were the agents of Britain's imperialism although it was an imperialism very much in retreat as London looked to assuage the Arab nationalist *zeitgeist* while protecting its interests in South Arabia. Operating on the fringes – physically and figuratively – of an intelligence organisation based in Aden colony, their activities were used to inform government policy towards a range of tribes and their rulers and upon whose loyalty the emergence of a new political entity, the Federation of South Arabia, was supposed to rest.

Drawing on a range of hitherto untapped archival resources, it critically analyses the role of RAFIOs who, for the most part, had a granular view of the regional context and political choices that shaped tribal loyalties across the Protectorates. The numbers recruited were small, no more than six operating across the tribal lands of the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates (EAP/WAP) at any one time. They worked closely with the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL), the RAF officered but largely Arab manned mobile force established to protect RAF assets across South Arabia. The RAFIOs proved themselves effective intelligence operatives but whose product was ultimately diminished by inchoate intelligence machinery in Aden noted for its bureaucratic turf wars.[10]

What should not be lost in this story, however, was the motives of the RAFIOs. Much like generations of British officials who worked with tribal societies across the Middle East, their attitudes were framed by what Kathryn Tidrick referred to as a 'tradition of English interest in Arabia' which 'produced a feeling that the English presence in Arab land had something quite natural and inevitable about it'.[11] For while we should be wary of essentialising the motives and beliefs of RAFIOs as they sought to make sense of a tribal landscape buffeted by the uneven winds of modernity, we should not forget that their reports were filtered through a rationalist understanding of space and territory they looked to interpret and control. From this, it was hoped, a new political architecture across Aden and the Protectorates would emerge beneficial to its people and, of course, wider British interests.[12] As Athol Yates and Ash Rossiter remind us in their study of British intelligence in the Trucial States:

> [I]ntelligence gathering in such locations typically did not fit into either the category of conventional military intelligence i.e. focused on gathering and analysing information about the intentions and capabilities of other powers, or that of internal security intelligence, directed towards policing the domestic population. It was both things and more. It also required collecting a wide range of anthropological, topographical, and ecological information about the target territory, often in sparsely populated and hard to get to places.[13]

Air power, intelligence and South Arabia

How the British developed and utilised air power to control tribal unrest across its empire after the First World War has been well documented. Perhaps the most detailed account is to be found in David E. Omissi's work, *Air Power and Colonial Control*. It remains *the* authoritative study concerning how bureaucratic politics at the heart of Whitehall, coupled with the need to ensure the cost-effective security of Britain's new imperial possessions, determined the supremacy of air control doctrine.[14] Here, for the sake of brevity, it is worth noting how concepts such as 'air control' and 'air policing' evolved and were understood by both colonial and military officials in theatre. Air control doctrine itself developed organically out of successive campaigns in British Somaliland and Iraq in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. In effect, it meant that the RAF was assigned responsibility for the defence and security of these new possessions in the Middle East under the auspices of the Air Ministry in London. Air Policing was therefore a natural outgrowth from this, and broadly defined, meant the use of air assets to maintain the internal security of the state. Air proscription represented the operational and tactical use of aircraft in an offensive role, while Air Substitution was defined as the replacement of ground forces by aircraft where time, distance and expense negated the use of troops.[15]

At a time when the western construct of the state, let alone internationally recognised boundaries, remained anathema to many indigenous peoples, be they pastoralists or nomads, Air Control doctrine offered a relatively cheap and efficient way to interdict tribes bent on cross border raiding and to disrupt any perceived threat to the new dispensations that had emerged as part of the post-war settlement. Its essence was described by Air Vice Marshal Sir John Salmond who, referring to Iraq, noted that, 'It is commonplace here that aircraft achieve their results by their effect on morale, and by the material damage they do, and by the interference they cause to the daily routine of life, and not through the infliction of casualties.'[16]

It was disruption wrought by Air Proscription, rather than outright destruction to lives and property that, it was reasoned, would bring about order among rebellious tribesman and ensure obedience (if not fidelity) to a central authority. From a post-Colonial perspective, Mark Neocleous argued that air policing was a form of 'primitive accumulation', meant to deny tribesmen alternative forms of livelihood 'outside of the political economy being imposed by the Colonial order'. This construct of 'policing' rejects the separation between law-enforcement and military operations, arguing instead that the practical articulation of airpower, at least in its colonial setting, represented the physical manifestation of both as interlinked processes designed to both enforce state power and a key component in the building of a new order.[17] Accordingly, the use of air power was always more than just a reactive, punitive process; rather, it was designed to ensure state consolidation through tax collection and control of space through surveillance and surveying.[18]

The use of such measures was to be tightly controlled with a clear chain of command stretching from Colonial officials to the final authorisation granted by the High Commissioner. In line with such guidelines 'insurgents were to be issued with a clear ultimatum threatening air action', which included a cut-off date and time when air action may occur and a warning that women and children should be evacuated.[19] Within the broad ambit of Air Control, this

very much defined the policy of 'proscription bombing' but as Sebastian Ritchie has noted, by 1930 air control encompassed more than just inflicting aerial punishment. Across the Middle East, Afghanistan and Imperial India, the greater number of sorties flown by RAF aircraft were for reconnaissance or by impacting the morale of recalcitrant tribes by overflights that demonstrated both capability and potential intent.[20]

The RAF was aware, however, that the 'shock of the new' had its limitations. Salmond believed that indigenous reaction to bombing would progress through three stages: sudden panic, to be followed by indifference or 'even contempt for air attack followed by intense weariness and a longing for peace'.[21] It is worth noting that these were assumptions, rather than deductions derived from hard evidence. Still, in the case of Yemen and South Arabia, the role of Air Control was, from an operational perspective, relatively successful in the inter-war period.

At its core, British policy was centred on protecting the Aden colony. Beyond Aden itself, treaties of protection and friendship linked Britain with a series of largely Shaffei (Sunni) tribal Shaykhs and Emirs in the EAP and WAP. In terms of (1) protecting Aden (2) upholding treaty obligations with tribal leaders of the hinterland and (3) warding off the territorial claims of the Imam Yahya of Yemen, the application of Air Control was a relative success. From 1921 onwards, the use of air power, not least in the border areas around Dhala and Beihan was crucial in defeating several armed incursions by mainly Zeidi forces loyal to the Imam of Yemen. Air proscription for example proved crucial around Dhala in August 1928 in deciding the battle in favour of the frontier tribes bound to Britain by treaty. Under the rubric of air policing, proscription proved crucial in forcing the Queteibi tribe of the Radfan to desist from exacting 'tributes' by force from Yemeni trade caravans transiting their territory on route to Aden.[22]

Peter Dye notes that such air operations inside South Arabia were largely parsimonious, both in their implementation and outcome. Between 1919 and 1939, some 26 discrete air operations were conducted to either prevent outright banditry or where necessary, to enforce Government control. Aside from direct operations against Yemen which ceased in 1934, only twelve deaths were directly attributed to aerial attacks during this period, a remarkably low level of attrition.[23] Still, in an area defined by precipitous mountain ranges and an arid coastline, the writ of the Crown – seen in the acute levels of underdevelopment – remained limited.

In 1937, such low casualty figures led one commentator, Air Commodore Leslie Howard-Williams, to argue that Air Control was a more humane means to secure British interests across the Middle East, avoiding as it did the large-scale troop casualties that invariably accompanied ground operations. Of course, aside from the self-serving nature of such comments that privileged the position of the RAF, it was often the case that air proscription supplemented ground operations, rather than supplanting the use of troops. Even so, the RAF were keen to ensure that irrespective of the nature of operations, intelligence regarding the tribal landscape informed operational planning. This was not always easy. The production of accurate and timely intelligence from tribal sources was difficult to obtain and often had to be treated with circumspection lest the inflation of threat was used to disguise the settling of more parochial scores.[24]

Here, the role of both Colonial officials and RAF officers able to gather intelligence 'up country' across the Middle East played a crucial role. While in Iraq and Transjordan, RAF Special Service Officers (SSOs) were deployed on a systematic basis to work with and among tribes, it was only in the 1950s that a system was put in place to recruit and deploy RAFIOs across the protectorates of South Arabia.[25] That RAF officers, rather than their counterparts in the British army, were recruited was the legacy of the air control scheme that combined economic expediency with swift operational reach.

Accordingly, Aden remained an RAF sinecure. It was, however, one that from the early 1950s onwards, wrestled with a series of tribal revolts along the border with Yemen, many inspired by the continued territorial claims of the Imam that often slipstreamed behind ongoing inter-tribal disputes over trade routes. These were difficult enough to police. But when, from 1955 onwards, such disputes were overlaid by an Arab nationalism, sponsored by Cairo, that deliberately looked to challenge the last vestige of Western imperialism on the Arabian Peninsula, air control had to adapt to a regional setting markedly different from the interwar period. The recruitment and deployment of RAFIOs was part of this response. Their role was not, however, to enforce the writ of Aden across the hinterland of the Protectorates through physical occupation: this was nigh on impossible. Rather, it was to control and monitor movement through and across the space of the Protectorates by providing timely and actionable intelligence that would allow the APL, backed where necessary by Air proscription, to support the Shaykhs, Sultans and Emirs, across the Protectorates upon whom the future of British interests across South Arabia ultimately rested.[26]

In the immediate years after 1945, British policy towards the Protectorates, hitherto a neglected area of development, began to shift. The need to enlist the support of tribal leaders to curtail internecine tribal strife that was all too easily manipulated by Yemen to press its territorial claims became increasingly pronounced. From 1948 onwards, a series of forts and customs posts were built along the border between the WAP and Yemen. They were protected by detachments from the APL who also provided security for airstrips established close to the Yemeni border at Dhala, Mukeiras, Lodar, and Beihan.[27] The government authorities in Aden claimed that such posts and attendant infrastructure were allowed under the 1934 Anglo-Yemeni treaty that had attempted to demarcate the border, most having been built at least three miles inside Protectorate territory. While meant to bind Aden closer to the fate of the various tribal rulers by ensuring tax on goods crossing their territory could be collected on their behalf, this often inflamed feelings among tribal groups who refused to recognise the legitimacy of such boundaries, let alone the need to pay such duties.

Led by seconded officers from the RAF Regiment, the role of the APL had not much changed since its establishment in 1928. It was to '[D]efend the frontier, to protect advanced landing grounds and to foster cohesion among the hinterland tribes so they could more firmly resist the Imam of Yemen'. [28] This mission became more pronounced after 1948 when the new Imam of the ruling *Hamid'Ud'Din* in Yemen, Imam Ahmed, came to the throne in particularly bloody circumstances. His father, Imam Yahya, had been murdered as part of a failed putsch which his son blamed on an opposition group, the Free Yemenis. This, he claimed, enjoyed the protection of the Aden government.

There is scant evidence to suggest the British had anything to do with this attempted putsch, but it fed a grievance long-held by Yahya that Sana'a had been bested by Aden in signing the Anglo-Yemeni treaty. From meddling in tribal affairs in Dhala through to vociferous protests in 1949 over the establishment of a customs post at Negd Marqad in Beihan state close to the Yemeni border, exchanges of fire across the boundary lines had increased exponentially by the early 1950s.[29] Here, the role of the APL came increasingly to the fore. Equipped with Ferret armoured cars, it was a largely mobile force designed to provide a reassuring presence to those Protectorate rulers tied by treaty to Britain. They also supported the more static Government Guards (GG) and their counterparts in the EAP, the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion (HBL), locally recruited militias who garrisoned the various forts and customs posts along the frontier. Where needed, it was the job of the APL to organise airstrikes if it was felt reliance on small-arms fire was insufficient to counter dissident tribal activity or, on occasion, suppress fire from across the border in Yemen.[30]

A patrol of the APL led by Flt Lt John Bone (in beret back to camera) in the West Aden Protectorate. The emblem of the APL can be seen on the turret of the Ferret armoured car (Courtesy of the RAF Regiment Heritage Centre, RAF Honnington).

Matters, however, came to a head in 1954. A fort garrisoned by Government Guards had been established at Robat at one end of the remote Wadi Hatib in the Sultanate of Upper Awlaqi. It soon attracted the attention of the Shamsi, a sub-tribe of the Rabizi who, led by Shaykh Salim Ali Mawer, enjoyed material support from Yemen. Air proscription as well as increased fighting patrols by the APL did much to curb, but never fully control, the activities of the Shamsi. This came at considerable loss of life to the rebels but also to Government Guards and the APL, whose dead included Wing Commander Rodney Marshall and his adjutant, Flight Lieutenant John Lee. By the summer of 1955, such was the continued pressure on Robat that the fort was finally abandoned. While presented as a tactical withdrawal, this was a defeat for the British who had underestimated the tenacity and resilience of these formidable foes. It also evidenced the paucity of sound intelligence reaching Aden in understanding the political dynamics that determined the actions of the Shamsi. It was against this background that the need for the RAF to develop their own intelligence-gathering capabilities across the Protectorates was identified. The role of the RAF Intelligence Officer was born.[31]

The recruitment of RAFIOs, however, should not be seen in isolation from the disparate nature of intelligence gathering in Aden and across the Protectorates. As one Colonial Officer report noted:

> One of the matters about which Ministers, and Chiefs of Staff were most concerned last year (1955) in the context of unrest in the Western Protectorates was the adequacy of intelligence arrangements in Aden. An intelligence centre is now in course of being set up in Aden under a Protectorate Intelligence Officer who will coordinate all intelligence about the protectorate obtained from political and military sources……
> One factor which has in the past made it difficult to get enough reliable information from the Protectorate

> has been a shortage of Political Officers in the Protectorate, but the number of vacancies of this kind has been steadily reduced in the last few months.[32]

It was true that the dearth of Political Officers who acted as advisors to the various rulers across the WAP and EAP hampered the acquisition of timely intelligence. Most were not trained intelligence officers, the understanding of tribal politics with its slow accumulation of knowledge, customs and the gaining of trust often sitting uneasily alongside the more immediate demands of military operations. The RAFIOs were meant to bridge that gap although as will be noted, tensions remained. But the intelligence machinery that now emerged in Aden, while designed to expedite the efficient production of intelligence and its effective distribution, often proved less than the sum of its parts.

The new Aden Intelligence Centre (AIC), established under the auspices of the Aden Government was headed by a retired naval officer, Hilary Colville-Stewart. Military intelligence was overseen by a Senior Intelligence Officer (SIO), British Forces Arabian Peninsula, holding the RAF rank of Wing Commander.[33] They both sat as part of the Local Intelligence Committee (LIC), a sub-branch of the Joint Intelligence Committee, which produced a monthly report that was circulated up the chain of command to Whitehall. Intelligence in Aden colony itself was the responsibility of a reformed Special Branch whose numbers remained pitifully small. It too had representation on the LIC but bureaucratic politics hampered the assessment process as information gathered, for example in Aden, was often viewed in isolation from events elsewhere in the Protectorates.

Still, these intelligence arrangements enjoyed the benediction of a largely favourable report published in September 1956, by the Deputy Inspector General of Colonial Police, G.R.H Gribble. But by viewing the increased unrest on the Protectorate borders as largely a problem to be policed, a mindset was created that treated dissident activity in the Protectorates as largely tribal. This, it was felt, could be managed through political arrangements with Protectorate rulers who would be guided by British Agents and their Assistant Advisors or Political Officers. While a ready panacea, this failed to appreciate fully the wider regional context – Yemeni territorial claims, Saudi intrigue, and, crucially, the growing appeal of Egyptian-sponsored Arab Nationalism – that cumulatively, would recast the political and social order across South Arabia.[34]

Institutional myopia afflicted decision-making at all levels in Aden and London and the intelligence machinery in South Arabia was no exception. The AIC and the LIC failed to produce what contemporary intelligence professionals now refer to as fusion: the establishment of a centralised hub for the collection, collation, assessment, production, and dissemination of intelligence, widely seen as a *sine qua non* for cooperation and effective use of intelligence.[35] Indeed, at a more prosaic level, security surrounding secret intelligence reports in Aden was remarkably lax. One SIO, Wing Commander Lionel Folkard, recalled daily intelligence summaries issued by his office to army units deployed on internal security duties and marked 'Secret' all too often making an unwelcome reappearance 'floating round the gutters of Tawahi (a district of Aden)'.[36] Such was the intelligence realm within which RAFIOs were now recruited, a realm whose bureaucratic tribalism could appear as complex and taxing as that of the Protectorate hinterlands which now awaited.

RAFIOs: Roles and responsibilities

On 31 December 1954, the Air Ministry in London received the following secret cable from Aden:

> Proposed to add three (R) three Flt Lt intel posts to HQBF Aden for duties with Aden Protectorate Levies under the control of Int Aden. Subject MEDEC agreeing those posts anticipate can find one suitable officer from own resources and will require two (R) two ex UK officers to be Flt Lts unmarried and Arabic speaking preferably of G.D or Regiment. Officers will be required to stay long periods in the protectorate driving their vehicle and accompanied by a cook bearer.[37]

This formalised the recruitment of RAFIOs although one RAF Regiment Officer, Flt Lt Adrian McGuire, had, *de facto*, been serving in this capacity for nearly a year. He had been present at Robat with the APL and his actions both during and after the bloody encounter with the Shamsi, actions that included parlaying with its tribal elders to return the body of Wing Commander Marshall, brought home the practical value of individuals familiar with the landscape, both tribal and physical.

The initial requirement of three RAFIOs was soon expanded to five, a seemingly meagre investment when set against the sheer geographical size of the Protectorates, and their tribal complexities. Still, given the level of dissident activity, the decision was made to station one RAFIO in each of the following areas of the WAP: Eastern encompassing Beihan, Upper Aluqi Sultanate and Upper Aulaqi Shaykhdom; Southern which embraced the Lower Aulaqi Sultanate, Fadhli, Dathina and Audhali; Western, which took in Lahej, Lower and Upper Yafa, Dhala, Radfan, Haushabi, Alawi, Subeihi and Shaib.[38]

From the outset, it was made clear that RAFIOs had to maintain 'close contact with the Political Officers in your area' from whom information concerning their area of operations was to be gleaned. Political officers or Assistant Advisors worked closely with Protectorate rulers, ensuring an effective link back to Government House in Aden. While their roles were distinct from those of the RAFIO, a real possibility existed of intelligence overlap and being exploited by the same source.[39] One Assistant Advisor based in Dhala insisted that clear protocols be followed, arguing that:

> I feel that it is essential that we know where we stand and whether his (RAFIO) secret intelligence reports are open to our scrutiny or not. Alternatively, I can see a recurrence of the anomalies which existed here before the war, when both Political officers and RAF intelligence officers had their informers often submitting reports on one incident which hardly agreed in any way, and again the 'professional informers' did very well extracting 'zaid wa nahas' from both camps.[40]

The concern of being 'played' was constant in dealing with informers but the existing records are scant as to whether this ever did impede intelligence collation and assessment by the AIC. But if the information gleaned from agents and informers was primarily operational, it struck a chord with wider concerns raised in the Gribble report that '[T]he needs of operational intelligence is not allowed to swamp the acquisition and collation of long term intelligence' and should be treated as largely separate endeavours. But operational intelligence hardly emerged from an apolitical vacuum and as events now unfolded along the Protectorate borders with Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the distinction was often hard to make, let alone maintain. All were supposed to work closely with the Government Guards who provided an element of base security. In reality, the responsibilities, and operational demands on RAFIOs meant that their movements could not always be shadowed by the GG or indeed the APL.

The primary role of the RAFIOs was, of course, counter-subversion by ensuring familiarity with the tribal landscape and topography as they tracked and monitored dissident activity along the border with Yemen and later on, Saudi Arabia. To this end, identification of sites which could also be used as airstrips for the rapid troop deploying to potential trouble spots was accorded high priority. Equally, and in line with the logic of air proscription, they identified targets to be hit should such action be deemed necessary. Inevitably such attacks inflicted casualties. The belief, however, was that by having intelligence officers versed not only in tribal politics but in understanding local topography, the application of aerial violence, where necessary, would be proportionate and discriminatory relative to the political objectives set.[41]

Of the skills required by the RAFIOs, linguistic ability, married to a natural curiosity of the Arab world was essential. Those officers selected underwent a short but intensive Arabic language course at the School of Oriental and African Studies, while also receiving detailed training in intelligence work from MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service. The value of the former was self-evident: the latter less so. Managing to lose a tail or organising dead-letter drops had some

use in urban areas but was of limited utility in remote areas of Arabia where being seen was often encouraged. Still, the psychology of agent handling and how to establish a network were useful skills gained, even if these were largely moulded around the experience of operating in Europe during the Second World War.[42] The next port of call was an intensive ten-month Arabic course, taught at the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies in Lebanon, and given its association with the British Foreign Office, known widely (but inaccurately) as the school for spies. From the existing records, it is not known if all RAFIOs completed the MECAS course or if exigencies in the Protectorates cut short their time spent studying in the hills above Beirut.

What is clear, however, is that the demands to be made on these men were extreme. Putting aside the inevitable comparisons with T.E. Lawrence, these RAFIOs immersed themselves in the tribal landscape of the Protectorates, a role that required them to be part warrior, part social anthropologist, part doctor, part explorer, part diplomat, as well as a spy. Such men were deployed for periods of anywhere between three to six months, the sole contact with other Europeans being in the form of regular radio transmissions from their particular 'parish'.[43] If the possession of linguistic ability was self-evident in such an immersive role, so was physical fortitude. Basic hygiene rules had to be always practised but even so, stomach complaints and severe bouts of diarrhoea were an occupational hazard. On occasion, this required hospitalisation and extended periods of convalescence. For some, it proved too much. After enduring just over a month in the field, one RAFIO quickly tendered his resignation. For the majority, however, it truly was their metier.

Maintaining strict daily transmission schedules were not only necessary for information purposes but in ensuring the well-being of the officer concerned, particularly when operating in areas beyond the immediate reach of the APL or Government Guards. All signals back to HQ British Forces Arabian Peninsula in Aden were prefixed by the personal call sign of the RAFIO concerned followed by CONREP (Condition Report). The omission of CONREP from a signal meant that the RAFIO was compromised and perhaps signalling under duress.[44]

Aside from the daily signal reports, each RAFIO was expected to prepare a bi-monthly intelligence summary detailing activity in their area of operations. These reports included photographing properties, for example Dars (fortified buildings of tribal Sheikhs) wells and other structures that might be of 'operational value' should air proscription be deemed necessary in future operations. Such photographs were accompanied by detailed information on levels of cultivation, key personalities in any given area, the economic conditions that determined social and political loyalties as well as identifying potential airstrips and their elevation. This often required the skills of a cartographer as maps of the Protectorates, even in the 1950s, were often inaccurate. Using such airstrips, light aircraft such as Pioneers, Beavers and Valetta transports collected these bi-monthly reports for the AIC while in return, basic supplies could be delivered quickly. Movement across the Protectorates was by Land Rover with the RAFIO accompanied by a signaller and cook, both seconded from the APL. While a nominal base was usually established in one of the main towns close to a Government Guard position, RAFIOs often spent weeks living out in the open, dependent for the most part on what could be carried in the back of their vehicle. As one RAFIO noted somewhat laconically, 'Break-downs on these occasions are most unwelcome, and a certain amount of mechanical knowledge is almost an essential.'[45]

Becoming an effective RAFIO, however, proved a steep learning curve. Aside from the requirement to develop an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the tribes in the allocated area of operations, unravelling parochial disputes from Yemeni inspired insurgency required acute understanding of social ties and political allegiances if air proscription, once called upon, was to be effective. It was not uncommon for tribesmen, in the hope of besting rivals over, for example, control of trade routes, to embellish information regarding the nefarious cross-border activity that might or might not have more sinister political motives. Sorting the intelligence wheat from so much tribal chaff was particularly vexing for the RAFIOs stationed in Beihan. The adjacent town of Beidha just across the border in Yemen was widely regarded as the focal

point of dissident activity. At the same time, it was an important economic and commercial centre used by tribes on both sides of the WAP-Yemen border. Recognition of the legitimacy, if not legality, of the 1934 line of demarcation remained scant at best. Thus, while the Imam was never slow to use tribal dissonance to advance his territorial claims, incidents such as camel theft between tribes traversing the border had to be contextualised if violent overreaction on the part of Aden was to be avoided.[46]

The need to quell inter-tribal feuding was equally pressing lest it allowed the Yemenis to leverage greater influence in the Protectorates. Thus in December 1955, one RAFIO, Flt Lt Bill Shevlin, found himself in the role of diplomat, mediating in a vicious inter-tribal dispute over water resources in the Lower Aulaqi Sultanate that threatened to spill over into a wider conflict following the killing of a tribal Regent in Ahwar.[47] Of course, as Martin Thomas noted of British and French intelligence officials operating across Iraq and Syria in the interwar period, the prime responsibility of such personnel '[W]as to provide regular covert intelligence to facilitate the subjugation of such tribal groups. Their security role was always at variance with the common inclination among tribal control personnel to immerse themselves in Bedouin culture.'[48] This dichotomy was certainly apparent in the actions of Shevlin. Noted as a 'brilliant' Arabist who had served previously with the Jordanian Arab Legion, his duties as a RAFIO seemed almost incidental to his true interests. According to one account, 'He acquired an immense knowledge of the tribes and terrain, lived an isolated life deep in tribal territory and spent many years on a job which fascinated him, but which would have proved intolerable for many people.' [49]

Flt Lt Bill Shevlin (left wearing beret) with two visiting RAF officers at a makeshift airfield close to the Yemen border (Courtesy of the RAF Regiment Heritage Centre, RAF Honnington).

As pronounced as this fascination for Arabia was among all serving RAFIOs, it should not disguise their central role: coordinating the use of airpower as a political deterrent or, where necessary, to exact revenge. While preference was for the APL to show the flag to quell tribal dissent, the nature of the terrain coupled with consistent unrest did determine the use of aerial violence. For example, one RAFIO, Flt Lt C.M.G Watson recommended the use of Shackleton heavy bombers, based at RAF Khormaksar, in Aden to punish the Hamumi tribe in Qaiti State, part of the EAP, who continually threatened to cut the main road and core trade artery running through the state. Its leader, Ahmad bin Hibraish, refused to accept the writ of the Qaiti state rulers who now looked to Aden for support. Concerning the type of aircraft to be used Watson concluded that:

> Should it be necessary to dislodge tribesman from the peaks [along the road] I recommend strongly that Shackleton aircraft armed with a good load of light anti-personnel bombs be used. I submit, with respect, that it would be a great mistake to use Venoms (fighter aircraft deployed in the ground attack role) not

only because of the range limitations but because of the limitations of a Venom's armament, which was never designed for the job of dislodging tribesman from hilltops.[50]

The beginning of 1956 saw three RAFIO operating across the WAP: Flt Lts Tony Jarvis, Adrian McGuire, and Bill Shevlin. By the end of the year, two more had been posted to the EAP including Watson, recognition of the sudden spike in dissident activity that looked to Saudi Arabia for its support.[51] Aside from longstanding territorial claims over the Protectorates, relations between London and Riyadh had soured over competing claims to the Buraimi oasis, thought to contain substantial oil reserves. This was contested by Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and the Trucial state of Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, supported by Britain on the other. Diplomatic ties had been broken between London and Riyadh when, in 1955, the British-led Trucial Oman Scouts evicted a Saudi police contingent following the failure of international arbitration efforts over the contested oasis.[52] The upturn in tribal unrest in the EAP was Saudi Arabia's violent response.

RAFIOs: Hunters and gatherers

In April 1958, an intelligence summary from the AIC noted that an undeclared war now existed between Yemen on the one hand and the Aden government and its friends in the WAP on the other. It noted that 'Yemeni attacks across the frontier have become more numerous, more blatantly aggressive …in the Emirate of Dhala a determined attempt has been made to provoke a general uprising and to detach a not unimportant district from the Western Aden Protectorate.'[53] This undeclared war now included the Saudis. From the beginning of 1956, the AIC was already reporting the growing influx of arms and ammunition into the northeast of the WAP from Saudi Arabia. Aside from the ongoing Buraimi dispute, it was reckoned that territorial designs on the area, designs that placed the Saudis at odds with Yemeni claims, determined Riyadh's actions. While the Shamsi were the main beneficiaries of Saudi largesse, it was feared the wider effect of such arms supplies would be to rally 'dissident or disgruntled tribes and sections in the Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom and Sultanate of Beihan'. [54]

Tracking the smuggling of weapons proved a major part of the RAFIOs intelligence work and, given the almost entire absence of intercepted signals traffic – tribesman, dissident or otherwise rarely had access to radio communications – was almost wholly reliant on occasional aerial reconnaissance or the running of agents and informers. The tracking or arms smuggling was deemed crucial as the serial numbers from captured weapons could provide accurate estimates as to the number of weapons in circulation across the WAP. While this was not to be taken as a key indicator of the likely numbers of dissident tribesman operating across the Protectorate – after all, the possession of a rifle was (and is) regarded as a symbol of masculinity – the volume coming across the border from Saudi Arabia by 1957 was concerning. Such supplies, it was believed, were 'aimed at the disruption of established law and order' across the Protectorates. Careful analysis of captured weapons could at least give a rough indication of the quantity of arms and their origin, information that could be correlated with reports of camel trains, and the likely capacity of these 'ships of the desert' to carry such heavy loads.[55]

Of an estimated 111,000 males in the WAP, over half were reckoned to carry a firearm. Of these, roughly 39,000 were believed to be modern, that is bolt-action rifles introduced post-1914. It should be noted too that government officials often condoned the gift of rifles to various rulers if it was thought such transactions might ensure the fidelity of various Emirs and Sheikhs. One intelligence report noted a government-approved gift of 125 rifles to tribesmen in the Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom at the end of 1957, while at the same time donating an undisclosed number of weapons to a rival Sheikh, telling him that 'they [the Aden government] will never acknowledge or admit publicly that Government ever made such a present to him.'[56] A somewhat quixotic arrangement, it was also counter-intuitive. Arms were effectively being used to barter tribal loyalty but with no hard certainty that such loyalties would be anything but

transient. Given, moreover, the far larger quantities of arms being brought over the border from Yemen and Saudi Arabia, this small-arms race was self-defeating as tribes would still gravitate towards the stronger party in extremis. The sense that British policy was just adding fuel to a fire it could not fully control was palpable. As Jarvis noted about arms requested by the Maraqasha, a tribe in the Fadhli Sultanate:

> The only real danger that I can foresee is that with all these weapons coming in, old blood feuds may break out again. The Maraqasha are not the only tribe that are receiving weapons and it is not beyond the realms of possibility to find ourselves right back where we started… Arming or allowing the tribesmen to arm would appear to be equally wrong; that is if pacification and eventual federation is our aim.[57]

For the RAFIOs, this only increased the importance of running reliable informants to understand the cause and effect behind such deliveries. After the humiliation experienced in Wadi Hatib, the future intentions of the Shamsi remained a pressing concern. While it was known that several airstrikes had killed camels and goats and inflicted injuries on several of their number, the leader, Shaykh Salim Ali Mawer, was still perceived as a major threat to the stability of the Upper Yafi Sultanate. Tracking the Shaykh and the movement of his followers was a tortuous process but one that, in 1956, occupied much of the time and resources of Jarvis, the RAFIO for the area. While he managed to recruit a tribal elder, who gave him information as to the likely whereabouts of the Shaykh in a series of caves, Jarvis acknowledged that he was often defeated by the tyranny of distance in providing actionable intelligence: it took an informer 24 hours to travel from the Wadi Hatib to his base at Am Quleita and 'Information may well be stale when it reached me.'[58]

Members of an APL patrol with tribesmen (unknown), armed with British Lee-Enfield. 303 rifles, the EAP, 1957. (Courtesy of the RAF Regiment Heritage Centre, RAF Honnington)

While trying to counter small-arms smuggling as a currency of influence, the RAF became equally concerned over the appearance of heavy weaponry on the Yemen border, and in particular, the increased deployment of anti-aircraft guns. While Sana'a could never hope to match British airpower based at RAF Khormaksar, the vulnerability of light aircraft using makeshift airstrips close to the border with Yemen, airstrips vital to the effective operational and intelligence role of RAFIOs, was a concern. More broadly, it threatened to nullify two important elements of air control: tactical air reconnaissance and rapid troop mobility.

Having developed a network of informers that not only straddled the WAP border but reached deep into Yemen, Flt Lt Adrian McGuire was able to produce a detailed estimate on Yemen's

air defence system. Likely of Czech or Russian design, four light anti-aircraft weapons were located at the border town of Qataba. Intriguingly, McGuire detailed the deployment of heavy anti-aircraft guns around the Yemeni capital Sana'a, the city of Taiz and the town Ibb. Of Sana'a McGuire noted that 'a heavier Anti-Aircraft gun was used by the Yemenis against our forces at SANAAH [sic] on 27th January 1957.' While the RAF flew numerous sorties against targets just inside Yemen, often but not exclusively in response to Yemeni attacks on GG garrisoned forts or APL patrols, RAF flights over the Yemeni capital were officially denied. From McGuire's report, however, such flights did take place although most were reconnaissance missions, rather than anything more kinetic.[59]

Technical information on the capabilities of Czech and Soviet anti-aircraft guns were highly prized by the RAF because they likely faced such weapons across the Iron Curtain in Europe. It is not clear from the existing records, however, if McGuire's network of agents inside Yemen (what he referred to cryptically as 'non-technical sources' in his report) were ever able to furnish him with shells or empty casings. These would have allowed for a more forensic examination of weapon capabilities and help shape RAF counter-measures. The importance of technical intelligence gathering aside, cultivating human Intelligence sources remained fundamental to countering the increased level of subversion from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The porous nature of the disputed borders in addition to the paucity of intelligence gleaned from other sources meant RAFIOs developed over time an anthropologist's eye that helped navigate much of the tribal environment. This was no mean feat.

More than most aspects of intelligence work, the handling of agents or informers is often extremely delicate, the success or otherwise of such endeavours dependent as much on personal chemistry as any political or ideological affinity. Considering the risks involved for the informant, trust was all. It was no mean achievement to recruit and send an informant into Beidha, for example, to try and glean the intentions of eighty Marqashis of the Fadhli tribe who, in October 1957, had gathered in the town to plan the killing of British officials in Fadhli Sultanate. While these planned attacks, encouraged by the Saudis, failed to materialise, the risks to such agents and informants were considerable: if even suspected, their fate would invariably have been bloody.

RAFIO Flt Lt Adrian McGuire, Aden, 1956. (Courtesy of the RAF Regiment Heritage Centre, RAF Honnington)

The intimate nature of such ties between handler and agent meant that when a RAFIO was posted elsewhere, there could be no guarantee that his replacement could build up a similar rapport and a valuable source might then be lost. This dilemma was never fully resolved. For the most part, however, RAFIOs managed to establish networks that gleaned good operational intelligence from the wider tribal gossip. Aware, for example, that Saudi Arabia was investing

considerable efforts in arms smuggling into the Hadrahmaut, Jarvis was running an informant 'I have known over a period of years' and who was able to identify the tracks that vehicles were taking into the EAP from Saudi Arabia. He continued: 'Two dissidents came from Ash Sharora [in Saudi Arabia] to a place near Minwakh [on the EAP/Saudi border] to entice more Searis (a dissident tribe) to the Saudi side with the old attraction of rifles and ammunition.'[60]

This posed a risk to the stability of the EAP but equally, had to be assessed against the tempo of a tribal life susceptible to conditions where severe drought was not uncommon. The Searis, largely a nomadic people dependent on tending goats and camels for their livelihood, remained dependent on access to wells in a region where severe drought was not uncommon. Such shortages made tribes susceptible to 'Riyal' diplomacy. In return for building 'tube wells' that tapped water resources deep underground, the Saudis expected tribes such as Searis to do their bidding in the EAP. This, coupled with the ever-present scourge of starvation, allowed the Saudis to leverage such vulnerabilities to their advantage. With an estimated three hundred Seari dissidents armed with modern weapons congregating in Ash Sharora – regarded by the British as the Saudi version of Beidha – the immediate solution suggested by Jarvis was to increase patrols of the HBL and increase the construction of a series of landing strips able to take light aircraft that could patrol closer to the border.[61]

The economic, as well as physical anomie faced by tribes such as the Searis, was widely reported by Assistant Advisors, Political Officers, as well as the RAFIOs. Through informers, as well as more open meetings with tribal elders, a sophisticated understanding of the Searis was developed, its various sub-tribes, families as well as key personalities. Such granular understanding was the norm for most RAFIOs but, surprisingly, it never appeared to inform wider government policy towards food insecurity that, as a consequence, was often rife for exploitation. In the summer of 1959, the failure of rains necessitated the emergency airlift of rice and grain to the Emirates of Beihan, Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom, and the Mahfid district of the Aulaqi Sultanate. This was flown up by the RAF in Beverley Transport planes to the stricken areas but all too often the delivery of such aid was dependent on the whims and caprice of individual rulers who saw the distribution of such aid as contingent on expressions of loyalty from the tribes affected. Because of the need to ensure buy-in from Protectorate rulers in the push for Federal reform, the Government in Aden proved reluctant to impose a more equitable distribution system on these Potentates. It was a system that undoubtedly fanned the embers of tribal unrest and undermined support for some Protectorate rulers on which the future edifice of the FSA came to rest.[62]

If officials in Aden were slow to realise the longer-term effects of food insecurity, the same could not be said regarding the spread of Arab nationalism across the airwaves of Radio Cairo. Particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Suez debacle that did so much to undermine British prestige across the Middle East, various reports from RAFIOs noted the corrosive effect that such broadcasts appeared to have across the Protectorates. Inevitably, such broadcasts presented the Protectorate rulers as stooges of the British, a line that enjoyed wide appeal, particularly among townspeople. At the end of 1957, Flight Lieutenant C.M.G Watson wrote from the coastal town of Mukalla that:

> As far as can be gathered, the Egyptian broadcasts are widely listened to in the Eastern Protectorate, and their effect is noticeable especially among the town Arabs who have more time to listen and are most susceptible to propaganda. The lower middle classes, in particular display distinct Anglophobic tendencies……. Whether the [Qaiti] state officials have the confidence of the majority of the population is a moot point. It seems likely that should the present smouldering Arab nationalism become overtly militant, the state officials would be forced to side with the mob, for their own protection.[63]

Of course, it is impossible to ever know the exact impact such broadcasts had on political loyalties. Writing anonymously for the Air Ministry Secret Intelligence Summary Watson noted that in Mukalla multiple political allegiances were at play. It was, he noted:

> [I]interesting to see how in and around the town, various systems of allegiance had superimposed themselves on the fundamental tribal patterns that prevail…. Thus there were those to whom loyalty to the Qaiti Sultan was paramount, those who had espoused the cause of the 'New Egypt 'of Colonel Nasser, and those whose interest were at one with the Government of Saudi Arabia. Here there was no consistent pattern of loyalty… but rather a series of constituent groups, from each of which one might hope to glean a certain amount of information about the activities of the other.[64]

Even so, in the Qaiti state, Radio Cairo was widely listened to on cheap, easily accessed transistor radios and, alongside propaganda broadcast from Sana'a, appeared to have a perceptible impact across all age groups. In Mukalla, Government officials faced increased bouts of stone-throwing from youths whose shouts and slogans repeated much of that they had just heard off the airwaves. Whether radio broadcasts alone were responsible for such incidents is doubtful, but it is noteworthy that the sloganeering of Radio Cairo had an appeal beyond the coastal urban dwellers of Mukalla. In one Bedouin village visited by Watson, he recalled young children shouting 'Ya'ish Gamal Abdul Nasser' (Long Live Gamal Abdul Nasser) quite openly.[65]

The broadcasts, however, were a wider portent of political trends across Aden and the Protectorates that the RAFIOs, let alone Political Agents and Assistant Advisers could do little to exercise. However good the intelligence flowing from RAFIOs back to Aden – and often it was political as much as it was operational – greater weight was placed by the AIC and Middle East Command in Aden on the latter. At one level this is understandable given the role of RAFIOs but equally, was short-sighted: the impact of air operations, often based on intelligence from RAFIOs, inevitably had political consequences. For while the use of air proscription was, as much as possible, discriminatory in terms of targets selected, innocents suffered and where they did so, such casualties (often exaggerated) were inevitably relayed to a much wider and unforgiving audience ill-disposed to whatever new constitutional arrangements that the British hoped to push. More broadly, the mindset of officials was that air policing was just that, policing, a cognitive bias that was slow to realise that the increased tempo of air operations reflected a quantitative and eventually qualitative change to the very threats facing the Protectorates that air control exacerbated rather than diffused.

These wider implications of how their intelligence was used to inform policy remained remote to the RAFIOs. They never forgot, nor flinched, from the true nature of their work, even if their numbers were in inverse proportion to the tasks demanded of them. In February 1957, Jarvis played a crucial role in extricating a patrol of the APL from a well-prepared ambush close to a village called Mishal in the Fadhli sultanate. Badly mauled and having incurred fatalities, including a Squadron Leader attached to the APL, only the timely arrival of a Shackleton heavy bomber coordinated by Jarvis onto specific targets prevented the APL patrol from being 'over-run and annihilated'. The thrill of what he was required to do is evident in his post-operational report which he concluded by adding somewhat triumphantly, 'This is definitely "Air Country"'.[66]

Conclusion

Recalling his time as the SIO in Aden in the late 1950s with direct command over the RAFIOs, Wing Commander Lionel Folkard offered this somewhat candid assessment of the efficacy of air control: 'It was', he noted, 'a fairly sterile policy, but its irresistible advantage in the eyes of Westminster was that it was cheap.'[67] Over time and viewed through a post-colonial prism, the role played by air control and its surrogate, air proscription, in sustaining the apparatus of colonial rule can jar with our liberal sensibilities. But placing such antipathies to one side, there are lessons to be drawn in how intelligence was used in support of air policing in South Arabia. Aside from a strict chain of command authorising such strikes, much was made of the need for reliable human Intelligence in deciding the most efficacious use of air proscription, be it actual or threatened. In an era before precision-guided weapons, the available records suggest

that the loss of life to RAF rocket and bomb attacks was surprisingly low. In many cases this was due to the skill not only of RAFIOs in coordinating strikes but equally, in understanding the actual nature of the threat faced, an understanding born from living with and travelling among the tribes of the Protectorates.

This stands in contrast, for example, to the controversy surrounding so-called 'signature strikes'; the selection of targets based on 'behavioural profile' by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or Drones. For example, RAFIOs understood that large gatherings of tribesmen carrying rifles were not necessarily a threat. By contrast, this lack of cultural knowledge has witnessed several examples of armed tribesman targeted by US Drones, irrespective of context across many of the self-same areas in southern Yemen where RAFIOs once operated. The technology might have improved, but the cultural intelligence that informs its use has certainly been found wanting. Proportionally, few tribesmen belong to al-Qaeda or are likely adhere to its jihadist ideology. Yet such strikes, almost always delivered without warning, are not only legally questionable, but deemed likely to increase rather than diminish support for al-Qaeda and its affiliates.[68]

By contrast, knowledge of tribal politics gained by RAFIOs was often deep, while being aware too that tribal agency was often circumscribed by the regional machinations of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Understanding where one ended and the other began could not be taught; it was acquired through often difficult experiences. Of the practical skills required of a RAFIO, the technical and linguistic had to be learned, but others, including the idioms of body language and tribal codes, was gained by living in the field. While never called anthropologists, they effectively practised its disciplinary precepts by observing, working, and living in what, by any standard, was a harsh and on occasion, hostile environment.

Despite their small numbers, RAFIOs did perform a valuable intelligence and at times diplomatic role, albeit one whose immersive character, at least to the outside observer, sat uneasily with the more martial element of their calling. For as much as this immersion served to create bonds of trust that, quite literally, saw RAFIOs place their lives in the hands of tribesmen, the relationships established could never be equal. In recalling his experiences as a British army officer in Afghanistan working with and living among tribes in Helmand province, in 2008–2009 (and one of the few who learned to speak fluent Pashto), Mike Martin opined that however good his cultural understanding of Helmand society was, his knowledge of what was going on was perhaps only one per cent.[69]

This likely applies to the RAFIOs as well. Undoubtedly, most were fine Arabists; all were decent individuals with a deep interest, indeed love for their surroundings and its people. But air control, the legacy of controlling empire 'on the cheap', created a mindset which shaped perceptions of the threat to be dealt with in which the distinction between immediate operational need and longer-term political effect was not always appreciated, either by the RAFIOs themselves or more importantly, their intelligence masters in Aden. Still and perhaps as something of a postscript, it should not be forgotten that by 1959, Yemen had almost totally ceased to support dissident tribes in WAP. While internal politics in Sana'a played the primary role, the operational (and at times political) intelligence produced by RAFIOs likely helped shape the outcome of a border war, which, in the short-term at least, was decided on terms favourable to Aden.[70]

Even so, the RAFIOs were servants of an empire fast approaching its end. Their operational reach was far and their granular understanding of tribal politics often deep. But as notable as these achievements were, RAFIOs were buffeted by wider political forces that they could not shape and over which, despite the quality of the intelligence produced, they could exercise little control.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

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20. Ritchie, pp.84–85.
21. Omissi, p.110.
22. Ritchie, pp.41–42.
23. Dye, p.54.
24. Ritchie, p.45.

25. Martin Thomas, 'Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial Intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq, and Transjordan in the 1920s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38/4 (2003), pp.548–49. Thomas makes the point that initially at least, RAF officers who formed the bulk of SSOs had far less experience of Arab and Muslim societies than their army counterparts.
26. The need to control movement, rather than consolidate occupation over a given territory or space was not unique to the British colonial experience in the Middle East. The need to recruit local irregular forces who could manoeuvre quickly against fast-moving rebel columns marked French military operations in Syria in the interwar period. See Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.101–18.
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29. For a more detailed discussion of Yemeni claims to the territory of the West Aden Protectorate see Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp.51–58.
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32. TNA CO 1035/83: Secret. Extract from Notes on Aden affairs submitted to Lord Lloyd on the 19th Jan. 1956.
33. The equivalent army rank is Lieutenant Colonel.
34. Gribble's overall recommendation was that intelligence coordination in Aden and the Protectorates was fit for purpose. He noted however that in the Protectorates, '[T]he needs of intelligence are best served by the stationing in a given area of a suitable officer giving his undivided attention to the acquisition and processing of intelligence and reporting it to an intelligence centre.' TNA CO 1035/86. Secret: Intelligence Organisation – Aden, 17 Sept. 1956.
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41. BL-IOR S/AD/13/11: Secret: Directive to Field Intelligence Officers, Eastern and Western Protectorates', 11 Oct.1958; A Man in a Kufiyyah', *Air Ministry: Secret Intelligence Summary*, p.24.
42. Yates and Rossiter, p.775; A Man in a Kufiyyah', *Air Ministry: Secret Intelligence Summary*, p.25.
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44. BL-IOR S/AD/13/11: Secret: Directive to Field Intelligence Officers, Eastern and Western Protectorates', 11 Oct. 1958.
45. Watson, 'Field Intelligence Officers in the Aden Protectorate'.
46. BL-IOR R/20/C/2095 – S/POL/3/21. RAF Intelligence Reports South and South East. Half Monthly Intelligence Report, Flt. Lt A.R. Jarvis, 1–15 Jan. 1956.
47. BL-IOR S/SPOL/3/22 RAF Intelligence Reports West and General [Eastern Aden Protectorate]. Secret: Intelligence Report for Period 16th–24th December 1955, Report No. W/6. Flt Lt. Bill Shevlin.
48. Thomas, p.549.
49. RAFR-HC. Handwritten note from Group Captain K.M. Oliver (undated).
50. BL-IOR. S/POL/2/22 RAF Intelligence Reports West and General [Eastern Aden Protectorate]. Secret: Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, Eastern Aden Protectorate (undated). Flt Lt C.M.G Watson RAFIO Mukalla.
51. BL-IOR. TS R/270, Government of Aden: Intelligence Staff (Top Secret). Letter form Brigadier W.S.F Hickie to Colonel Hugh Boustead, 26 Jan.1956; Air Vice-Marshal L.F. Sinclair to Colonel Hugh Boustead, 23 Jul. 1956; Wing Commander Lionel Folkard to A.F Watts (Acting Adviser, Mukalla), 4 May 1957. The average posting of a RAFIO in any one area was usually 3-6 months and it was not unusual for RAFIOs to rotate posts. Other known RAFIOs posted to the Protectorates during this period were Flt Lt Watkins-Field and

Flt Lt (later Squadron Leader) C.M.G Watson, and Flt Lt David Whitton as well as Flt Lts Adams and Williams. See TNA AIR 24/2452. HQBF Aden 1956.

52. Tore T. Petersen, *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East: A Willing Retreat* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), pp.10–11.
53. BL-IOR S/POL/3/1, R/20/C/2089/2. Secret. Intelligence Summary for the Month of April 1958 N.64.
54. BL-IOR, S/POL.3/1 R/20/C 2089/1. Secret: Western Aden Protectorate – Intelligence Summary for the Period 21st January to 20th February 1956, No.38 February 1956.
55. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2096 S/Pol/3/22. Secret UK Eyes Only: Report of Rifles in the Western Aden Protectorate
56. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2096 S/Pol/3/22. Secret. Amirate of Beihan/Upper Aulaqi Sheikhdom, 6 Jan.1958.
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58. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2095 – S/POL/3/21. RAF Intelligence Reports South and South East. Half Monthly Intelligence Report, Flt. Lt A.R. Jarvis, 1–15 Jan. 1956
59. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2095 – S/POL/3/21. Secret: Yemeni Heavy Weapons = North West Area, A.B McGuire, Flight Lieutenant, 14th Feb. 1957.
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63. BL-IOR. S/POL/3/22 RAF Intelligence Reports West and General [Eastern Aden Protectorate]. Secret: Fortnightly Intelligence Summary, Eastern Aden Protectorate (undated). Flt Lt C.M.G Watson RAFIO Mukalla.
64. A Man in a Kufiyyah II', *Air Ministry: Secret Intelligence Summary*, 14/10 (October1959), pp.15–16.
65. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2096 S/POL/3/22. Secret: Fortnightly Intelligence Report Southern Area of Eastern Aden Protectorate. Period Ending 14th August 1957, C.M.G Watson, RAFIO, Makulla, 14th Aug. 1957.
66. BL-IOR. BL-IOR. R/20/C/2095 – S/POL/3/21. Secret: Report on Operation at Mishal Village Fadhli Sultanate, February 1957, A.S Jarvis, Flight Lieutenant, Royal Air Force Intelligence Officer.
67. Folkard, *The Sky and the Desert*, p.93.
68. On drone strikes in Yemen, see Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, and David J. Callen, 'Drone Warfare in Yemen: Fostering Emirates through Counterterrorism?', *Middle East Policy,* 19/3 (2012), pp.142-56; Vivian Salama, 'Death from Above: How American Drone Strikes are Devastating Yemen', *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 14 Apr. 2014. Other studies do dispute the claim that drone strikes have only increased support for al-Qaeda in Yemen. See Christopher Swift, 'The Drone Blowback Fallacy', *Foreign Affairs,* 1 Jul 2012. Available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2012-07-01/drone-blowback-fallacy (accessed 21 Apr. 2021).
69. Martin, *An Intimate War*, p.234.
70. Sebastian Ritchie, *The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies: Later Colonial Operations, 1945–1975* (Shrivenham: Air Historical Branch/Centre for Air Power Studies, 2011), pp.81–82.