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**Military Intelligence and the War in Dhofar:  
An Appraisal**

*Abstract*

This article examines the role military intelligence played in the Dhofar campaign between 1970-1976. Drawing on an array of sources, it examines not only the crucial role played by military intelligence in prosecuting a successful operational campaign against a Marxist inspired insurgency, but equally, the importance that intelligence played in consolidating the Al-Bu-Said dynasty when across Oman and Dhofar itself, the material benefits to be had from the discovery and production of oil had yet to be realised.

## Introduction

It remains a truism that the acquisition and use of intelligence, as well as developing and maintaining the required machinery to sustain its timely production is integral to the prosecution of any successful counter-insurgency (COIN) campaign. Given this recognition, it is perhaps surprising that even today amid the vast array of literature dealing with COIN, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the role played by intelligence, and in particular military intelligence in campaigns where perhaps time and distance have served to assuage certain sensitivities. The Dhofar campaign remains a case in point. How the campaign was fought and the extent of British involvement was long been dominated by narratives that highlight the role played by the British 22 Special Air Service Regiment (22 SAS), a role that while seen as important – not least in the training and operations of the *Firqat* - has tended to overshadow the wider contribution and role of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) who undertook the bulk of the fighting on the Jebel.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, a sense of balance has been restored. The crucial role played by British officers serving on secondment with the SAF has increasingly been recognised, not least in the excellent study by Ian Gardiner, *In the Service of the Sultan*. Even so, discussion of the crucial role played by military intelligence remains conspicuous by its absence, a sin of omission that even extends to the current British Army Field Manual on COIN that otherwise extols the Dhofar campaign as 'one of the most successful counter insurgency operations in the twentieth century' and whose lessons are again being studied and digested by the British, Australian, US and Canadian armed forces.<sup>2</sup> Only one systematic study has ever appeared that analyses the evolution of intelligence structures in Oman throughout this period, a study that while informed by a historic narrative, remains focused on the ethnographic evolution of Oman's intelligence services from its dependence on British tutelage to its control by indigenous expertise by the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

This omission is even more surprising when one considers that the current lexicon applied to describe intelligence led operations in Afghanistan - the human terrain, intelligence preparation of the environment and 'areas of intelligence interest' - is a vocabulary that can equally be used to frame and understand events in Dhofar some four

decades previously and in particular how tribes across Dhofar were suborned as part of a wider attempt to fragment and eventually defeat an insurgency.

Such analogies aside however, the campaign in Dhofar is perhaps unique in one important respect: it stands alone as an example where military intelligence went beyond its functional task of providing timely information to the SAF; rather, it played an important role, hitherto overlooked in securing the state, helping to shape constructs of legitimacy among tribal groupings - such as the Qara (the original jebalis) Bayt Kathir and the Mahra centred on the denial of the other - that is framing tribal sentiment around a rejection of the secular Marxist orientation of Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) - rather than necessarily accentuating the positive virtues of supporting a dynastic order – the al-Bu Said - whose material largesse had yet to be fully realised.<sup>4</sup> As such, the traditional (and often simplistic) emphasis on ‘hearts and minds’ that conflates political loyalty with material wellbeing in deciding popular support requires some qualification in the case of the Dhofar campaign. In particular, how military intelligence came to understand and manipulate the tribal nature of the insurgency – the human terrain and its shifting loyalties - and how in turn this helped shape assessments of the operational environment remains an underexplored yet critical element of wider operations undertaken by the SAF that eventually defeated the guerrillas. This was no mean achievement in a country where, according to the Brigadier John Graham, commanding officer of the SAF between 1970-1972, ‘patriotism’, let alone loyalty was a ‘rare characteristic’.<sup>5</sup>

Based on archival sources, private papers, oral archives and interviews with former intelligence officials, this article begins by examining the intelligence deficit faced by the British at the start of the Dhofar campaign, a deficit which for the most was actually not fully addressed until 1975. Even so, the establishment of an effective ‘intelligence cycle’ with the arrival of personnel from the British Army’s Intelligence Corps in 1970 allowed the human terrain to be both understood, mapped and exploited properly for the first time, a process whose impact came to be felt beyond immediate operational need. Indeed, while pro-Sultan attitudes among the tribes undoubtedly took time to mature, military

intelligence was influential in helping to promote the wider acceptance of the Sultan's rule across the tribal landscape.

### The Origins of the Insurgency

The origins of the insurgency in Oman and Dhofar and the region of Dhofar in particular lay in the increased resentment among expatriate Dhofari workers in the early 1960s. Exposed to the siren-like calls of Arab Nationalism and the emergence of seemingly modern, dynamic Republican regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the archaic and isolationist rule of Sultan Said Bin Taimur by contrast was antediluvian. Oman lacked the basic infrastructure of a modern state despite the export of oil in commercial quantities by 1967. Radios were banned, there existed few metalled roads while education was limited to a select few required to run the country. The emergence therefore of the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) in 1964 as a focus of opposition was therefore almost inevitable when combined with the feelings of total estrangement from the Omani state. Indeed, lying some 600 miles from the capital Muscat, Dhofaris considered themselves distinct from the Arabs of Oman in language, history and culture.<sup>6</sup>

Combining Islamic piety with heartfelt if poorly articulated national aspirations based on tribal affinity, the DLF in which the Bayt Kathir were particularly prominent rejected closer ties with the rest of Oman in preference for Dhofari independence. From 1967 onwards however, the programme of the DLF became subservient to, and eventually subsumed by the more radical policies pursued by the PFLOAG. The emergence of PFLOAG was a direct result of the establishment in 1967 of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), following the final withdrawal of British troops from Aden and South Arabia in 1967. The new Republic, dominated by a Marxist government bent on introducing 'scientific socialism' to the Arabian peninsula began to exercise increasing influence over the military and political direction of the insurgency in neighbouring Dhofar, an influence that had by 1969 taken on a decidedly radical complexion.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as late as 1981 and long after the bulk of the insurgents had been vanquished, the PDRY remained beholden enough to its ideological affinity to continue its support for the remnants of PFLOAG.<sup>8</sup>

Although Anglo-Omani ties dated back to the late eighteenth century, it was only in 1958 that a treaty was signed that codified the military relationship between Muscat and London. In return for control of air facilities on the island of Masirah and Salalah in Dhofar, Britain agreed to help with development of the SAF, an agreement that included the provision of some officers on secondment from the British Armed forces with 'contract officers' – a politically acceptable term for mercenaries – supplementing the rest. With regards to the latter, their quality was decidedly mixed.<sup>9</sup> By the late 1960s however, the growing magnitude of the insurgency presented the United Kingdom with the prospect of two main overlapping strategic concerns. The attempt by London to form the Trucial states of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khamaih and Fujairah into a single polity - eventually to become the United Arab Emirates - would be threatened by the overthrow of a dynastic order in Oman by a movement whose ideological basis was anathema to very idea of dynastic states based on tribal hierarchy. Moreover, in light of the material support given to the PDRY by the Soviet Union (as well as the People's Republic of China) the collapse of the Sultanate and the emergence of a revolutionary regime in its wake could allow Moscow to exercise control over the strategic Musandam peninsula guarding the Strait of Hormuz and with it, the capability to interdict Western oil supplies in times of crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Against the wider context of the Cold War, such a scenario informed the deliberations of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the immediate aftermath of Britain's withdrawal from Aden, although as a more recent study has argued, the JIC 'broadly ascribed the growth of violence to internal actors and conditions'. As such there remained a clear difference to be drawn between outright 'external instigation and external support' of the growing insurgency across Dhofar.<sup>11</sup> Perception of threat was all however and certainly, among British officers who served in Oman there remained a strong belief that should Dhofar fall to PFLOAG, energy supplies to the west would have been 'seriously jeopardised.'<sup>12</sup>

A sense of urgency now prevailed. By August 1969 PFLOAG guerrillas had captured the administrative centre of Western Dhofar, Rakhyut, and by February 1970 rocket attacks against the Royal Air Force station at Salalah had become an occupational hazard of daily

life. In stark contrast, dependence upon the SAF to counter the insurgency was never matched by a similar commitment from Sultan Said bin Taimur to its modernisation, nor, as proved crucial, in using increased revenues from the production of oil to modernise the archaic infrastructure of state. Most worryingly of all however, he was now estranged from the tribes and their leaders such as Musalim bin Nufl across Dhofar whose conservatism had hitherto acted as a bulwark against 'progressive ideologies'. Amid the absolute poverty of Dhofar province however, such tribalism increasingly came to question the dominion of a venal ruler whose antiquated system of government now made his removal a matter of strategic necessity.

### The Intelligence Deficit

On 23 July 1970, Sultan Said bin Taimur was removed in a palace coup and replaced by his son, Qabus bin Said. With power now passing to a more enlightened ruler, the narratives surrounding the eventual defeat of the PFLOAG have come to assume an almost deterministic character. In particular, the role of British Army Training Teams (BATTs) formed around elements of the SAS, the *Firqat* - the tribal militias raised and trained by the BATT - as well as the Civil Action Teams (CATs) have widely been credited as being the 'match winners' of the Dhofar campaign. The CATs in particular oversaw the drilling of new water wells, introduced basic medical care where none had previously existed as well bringing new forms of husbandry to tribes across Dhofar. Such use of what might be termed 'soft power', has long been seen as critical in delivering victory to the Qabus bin Said.<sup>13</sup>

While not denying the efficacy of such measures, it should not be forgotten that more draconian methods continued to be sanctioned by the SAF in an effort to exert pressure on those tribal areas where succour, however limited was extended to the enemy or 'adoo'.<sup>14</sup> The need to ensure the legitimacy of 'who rules', as well as the 'how of being ruled remains key to understanding the ultimate triumph of a dynastic order over the revolutionary ideals of PFLOAG and in so doing, confirming the overwhelming tribal identity of the Sultanate. The tribal heritage of Qabus himself – his mother was a Dhofari from the Bayt Maasheni – certainly helped but such ties by themselves was never enough to decide Dhofar in favour

of the al-Bu-Said dynasty. Rather, a clear ability to physically exercise and sustain control over the Dhofari interior was crucial in bringing the tribes over to the government and as such, developing the machinery of an effective intelligence apparatus that could generate real-time information among a tribal society was crucial to ensuring operational success. Here, understanding the subtle but key difference between the ingrained attitudes of a tribe such as the Qara with their nomadic tradition, as opposed to its actual behaviour determined by circumstance or context was key to re-establishing government control over the tribes in the hinterland of Dhofar.

For example, a particular tribe or tribal leader could actually favour the PFLOAG guerrillas – support stemming from attitude – but the dominance of the Sultan’s forces in a particular area or a recognition that ultimately, the rebel cause was hopeless could determine actual behaviour on the ground, be it in the form of intelligence sharing or indeed, denying aid or sanctuary to the ‘adoo. This in turn could determine a decision in favour of the SAF.<sup>15</sup> Unlike ‘hearts and minds’ with its emphasis upon the material benefits to be accrued, this is a more sincere appreciation of engagement with the tribal landscape that did not disguise the efficacy of harsh measures. As one former officer seconded to SAF from the Intelligence Corps noted, ‘There was a conscious dynamic at work on the government side which sought to convey this consistent message: if you were with the government you would get money and security. If you were on the insurgent side, you would stay poor and get killed or captured.’<sup>16</sup>

It was understanding this important difference that was to become crucial to the role of military intelligence in defeating the insurgency in Dhofar (and indeed attempts to widen the war to the north of Oman). In 1970 however, the intelligence assets that existed across the Sultanate were hardly up to the task. A skeletal intelligence service under a seconded officer, Major John McFrederick who held the staff rank of G2Int did exist within the order of battle of the SAF but until 1970, it remained staffed by a mix of seconded British officers – known as Desert Intelligence Officers (DIOs) - on two year fixed tours of duty who reported directly up the SAF chain of command and Sultan’s Intelligence Officers (SIOs) mostly British nationals under direct contract to the Sultan. The quality of the latter was decidedly mixed.<sup>17</sup> Information was shared, but friction inevitably arose

over intelligence collaboration, impacting upon the development of an 'institutional intelligence memory', as both SIOs and DIOs inevitably came and went. Crucially, there existed little in the way of a trained indigenous capability upon which Colonial intelligence structures in the past had traditionally depended.<sup>18</sup> Where an SIO did gain useful information from the local inhabitants, the mass of material produced was rarely collected and collated as part of a recognizable intelligence cycle that could usefully produce assessments – political or military - because of inadequate supporting staff.<sup>19</sup> What little indigenous intelligence was forthcoming had to be treated with care based as it was on 'paid headmen' (muqqadam). Their information could be accurate but equally, was often influenced by the vagaries of tribal rivalries masquerading as insurgent activity.<sup>20</sup>

Even where trust was established among the tribes, the peculiarities of tribal fidelity often meant that the personal ties of friendship developed over time between intelligence officer and tribesmen could not easily be transferred to any replacement. Crucial time was often lost as the new intelligence officer looked to establish his credibility with his tribal interlocutor. Brigadier John Graham, commanding officer SAF between 1970 to 1972 claimed as much when he noted that 'Although we had [Sultan's] Intelligence officers living, with their stalwart Omani assistants, near the main centres of population, their ability to obtain from a largely unhelpful citizenry accurate information about clandestine activities was in truth less than we at the time believed.'<sup>21</sup> This is perhaps harsh on SIOs in Dhofar who had laboured under extreme difficulties to establish and service networks of agents, not least of which was the hostility of bin Taimur himself.<sup>22</sup> Even so, the need to establish an effective intelligence structure in Dhofar was now critical if the tarnished legitimacy of the Sultanate among the tribes was to withstand the seemingly inexorable rush of Popular Front which by the Spring of 1970 dominated most of the Jebel Dhofar and now appeared to be on the cusp of taking the regional capital Salalah.

### Building the Intelligence Machinery



In August 1970 it was agreed that an advance party of approximately 30 men from 22 SAS would begin to operate in Dhofar in an advisory under the cover of BATTs.<sup>23</sup> Given their later work with the *Firqat* or tribal irregulars whose members often consisted of former 'adoo, the SAS contribution to the Dhofar campaign has come to overshadow both that of the SAF but equally the role of British Army Intelligence Corps personnel, five of whom, all experienced non-commissioned officers with a command of Arabic accompanied the initial BATT deployment.<sup>24</sup> Their task was to develop an intelligence 'cell' where information and reports from SIOs and DIOs 'up country' could be collected, collated, analysed and disseminated - the classic intelligence cycle - that could then inform intelligence assessments for SAF and BATT operations. In time, such intelligence came to inform the strategy of successive SAF commanders in establishing a series of heavily fortified fences or 'lines' on the Jebel Dhofar from 1971 onwards from which aggressive patrolling by the SAF, supported by BATT, *Firqat* and later Iranian and Jordanian troops incrementally cleared the 'adoo from the Jebel and pushing them towards the border with the PDRY.

Located at the SAF base of Umm al Gwaref just outside Salalah, the intelligence cell quickly came to embrace psychological warfare as part of its remit, including the establishment of Radio Salalah which broadcast pro-government propaganda on to the Jebel as well the dropping leaflets in areas where 'adoo activity was suspected. Early versions of these leaflets extolled the piety and power of an Islamic order synonymous with the al-Bu-Said dynasty, while raging against the apostates whose belief in historical determinism ran counter to the very fabric of tribal society. Very little was actually said regarding the positive benefits to be gained from the restitution of the Sultan's authority across Dhofar although given that the impact of civil development had yet to be fully realised, the need to define common cause in terms of the 'negative' is perhaps not surprising.<sup>25</sup>

The production of timely operational intelligence however remained the primary focus of the Intelligence Corps cell and this was derived from a number of sources, not all of them secret. Given the dependency of the 'adoo on the ideological and logistical support of PDRY, contextual information was gleaned from open source publications such as the *Economist*

*Intelligence Unit* and transcripts produced by the BBC Monitoring Service of news bulletins - often exaggerated - from Aden which extolled the martial prowess and political successes of the Popular Front. Such broadcasts were useful in helping to piece together patterns of enemy behaviour – for example if a particular attack against RAF Salalah was claimed although suspicions that such broadcasts may have contained orders in code have never been proved. The actual role played by Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) remains an area where few sources are available but some real-time information was derived from radio communications in the field. Initially, this was limited since most communication between the various ‘adoo groups or ‘regiments’ in Dhofar was by courier. Some groups did eventually acquire walkie-talkies with a limited range while a rudimentary radio net linked some of the ‘adoo on the jebel with their rear headquarters in Hauf, just across the Yemeni border. Only after 1976 when the bulk of the ‘adoo had surrendered were the potential advantages (and risks to the SAF) of the rebels acquiring secure radio communications demonstrated. Some 60 hard core guerrillas remained on the Jebel and tracking their movements proved difficult because, as one Intelligence Corps officer noted, these guerrillas had now been schooled in the use of East German ciphers in Aden which could not be broken by the SAF.<sup>26</sup>

Other intelligence was gleaned from The Sultan of Oman’s Air Force (SOAF) which could, when tasked, produce aerial photographs which often compensated for the initially poor cartography of the region although airborne reconnaissance was of limited use between June to September when the great Khareef from the Indian ocean enveloped the Dhofar in a great mist. Particular store was also placed on captured weapons analysis of small arms indeed surface to air missiles since serial numbers could often disclose both the origin and quantity of a weapons system in the hands of PFLOAG and from this, give some indication of their numerical strength in particular areas and the threat that this may pose to SAF operations.<sup>27</sup>

The bulk of the information gained by the Intelligence Corps personnel was however derived from human intelligence sources (HUMINT), most notably informers and of crucial importance, surrendered enemy personnel (SEPs). It was a potentially rich source of

information but as Brigadier David Venn who, as a Captain in the Intelligence Corps, served in Dhofar between 1971-72 noted:

Previous SIOs had collected a mass of local information but, having no staff had been able to do little more than file away their reports in score files. This was where the Int. Cell (or spooks as they were universally known) came in. Their first task was to go through the mass of back reports and produce basic intelligence files on enemy orbat [order of battle], personalities, area briefs, re-supply and the rest.<sup>28</sup>

The importance of the cell cannot be overstated since it marked for the first time the emergence of a proper, efficient intelligence cycle and in the process, did much to erode suspicions that had previously marked functional relations between DIOs and SIOs. This in turn hastened the flow of operational and tactical intelligence to SAF units in the field. Nowhere was this pooling of information more important than in sharing access to the informers or 'Freds' a nomenclature borrowed from the ongoing 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. For Venn and his successors seconded to work at Brigade Headquarters, the Freds offered the best opportunity to gain hard intelligence on 'adoo activity on the Jebel that would otherwise have been denied to British officers. Indeed, reliance on the 'Freds' was accentuated by the complete lack of any intelligence from SAF head quarters in Muscat or the newly formed Oman Intelligence Service (OIS) - later to become the Oman Research Department (ORD) after 1974 - which mainly dealt with political intelligence across Oman. When viewed from the narrow perspective of operations in Dhofar, one Intelligence Corps officer noted that the OIS were 'lounge lizards' and consumers, not givers of intelligence.<sup>29</sup> The tasking of Freds was carefully co-ordinated with the SIO in Salalah supported by a Grade 3 Staff Officer (GSO3), usually a seconded Captain from the Intelligence Corps whose remit came to embrace both dealing with SEPs and helping to organise the Firqat.<sup>30</sup> All intelligence activity was directed from a building in Salalah that soon earned the Arabic sobriquet *Bayt Siyaasee* (the spies or spooks house) from which the various 'Freds', having been briefed were despatched to the hinterland and in particular, the area around the Jebel Qarra where much of the 'adoo activity originated.

Other more instinctive means to generate information and sources certainly reflected the tribal essence of this conflict, an essence that underscored the importance of behavioural support in generating intelligence: food security. Access to regular supplies of food was to become an increasing problem facing the guerrillas, particularly after 1971. The SAF

established a series of permanent bases on the Jebel from which offensive operations grew exponentially and which allowed the establishment of a series static lines designed to both interdict their supply routes and overtime push the 'adoo backwards towards the Yemeni border. Denial of regular food supplies food was therefore of critical importance in lowering enemy morale, forcing them increasingly to rely either on the goodwill of sympathetic tribes on the Jebel for sustenance or where necessary, to forcibly expropriate food supplies from Jebalis as real hunger began to bite.

Many Jebalis, particularly the Qara relied heavily upon upon a single government run shop in Salalah from which the basic staples of beans, rice and meat could be bought at subsidised prices. With the recently established 'Leopard' Line - in effect a large defensive barrier running from the coast, across the Jebel and towards the border with Saudi Arabia - now interrupting regular food convoys from Yemen reaching 'adoo held territory, particularly in the east of Dhofar, the decision was taken by SAF in April 1971 to exploit this potential vulnerability. It was announced that the store in Salalah would be closed for one month. Jebalis were able to stockpile supplies sufficient to feed their families but no more. The quantity of supplies carried by any one Jebali were checked on leaving Salalah to ensure the sufficiency principle was being applied. Underpinning the whole endeavour was the introduction of a new currency Riyal Saidi that now replaced the old Adeni pound that had remained legal tender across Dhofar and was freely available still in South Yemen.<sup>31</sup>

The extent to which this produced the desired results could be seen not only in the exponential rise of SEPs now surrendering to the SAF, driven by hunger off the jebel but in the quality of intelligence reaching HQ Dhofar Brigade detailing time, location and size of resupply convoys, usually by camel to 'adoo held areas as the impact of the food embargo began to have visceral effects. For example, a report from one SIO dated 15 February 1972 and based on information from a Fred codenamed 'Vittel' disclosed the impact that scarcity of food was now having upon some 'adoo.

All adoo [sic] are tired and hungry and most of them feel unwell as a result of having to rely on a diet which is a) deficient and b) mainly meat...Once again adoo ORs (other ranks) are arguing with their leaders, saying that without an adequate diet they cannot be expected to fight. They also say that they ought at least to be given leave to go to HAUF so that they can have a square meal.<sup>32</sup>

All SEPs were subject to detailed questioning by the Intelligence Corps cell who knew only too well that much of their information was of a time sensitive nature and required immediate action if it was to be on any wider operational use.<sup>33</sup> For example, knowing the total number of camels in any given convoy, as well as supply routes could at least give an indication of the volume of material reaching the four main PFLOAG operational areas from which a reliable estimate regarding their capabilities, if not their intended targets could be discerned.<sup>34</sup> Equally, where timely information was available, air strikes could be called upon such convoys, although the arrival of the great Khareef placed seasonal limitations on this method of interdiction.<sup>35</sup>

Yet while an increase in the volume of information gleaned from the likes of 'Vittel' now shaped assessments of the capabilities and intent of the enemy, this does not necessarily support the contention that the Jebalis were being won over by the largesse of Sultan Qabus in the form of freshly dug wells, medical clinics and so forth that had begun to appear on the Jebel. While welcome, such projects remained relatively few in number and were meant more as a demonstration of future intent than an immediate panacea to the social and economic ills facing the tribes. Moreover, where new wells were sunk in a particular area, the dominant tribe was often warned that should it be discovered later that succour was freely given to the 'adoo, this new source of water would be simply destroyed.<sup>36</sup> It demonstrated the extent to which, irrespective of attitude, the carrot and sticks associated with determining behavioural support was beginning to shape the human terrain in favour of the government forces.

Of course, the rebel cause was not helped by dissension within the ranks of PFLOAG itself at a time when the SAF had been at its most vulnerable and the legitimacy of Qabus yet to be consolidated. PFLOAG ignored the classic Maoist dictum of working with and among the people, rather than imposing a new, stridently secular order from the outset that denied agency to an indigenous sense of tribe or indeed religious belief. When combined with the harsh treatment meted out to tribes on the Jebel whose fidelity to the cause was suspect – reports of summary executions had already begun to reach the SIO in Salalah by the summer of 1970 – cracks began to appear among PFLOAG members. The

critical moment occurred in the so called Eastern Area of the Jebel in September 1970 when resentment over the harsh methods adopted by 'political commissars' attached to the 'adoo led to the bloody repression of disaffected tribesmen, many of whom had been former members of the DLF.<sup>37</sup> The resulting willingness of increasing numbers to return to the Sultan's embrace was no doubt amplified by the general amnesty offered to former DLF and PFLOAG members by Qabus as well as the attendant financial incentives of up to OR 500 available for the surrender of automatic weapons. As a result, between September 1970 and March 1971, some 201 PFLOAG turned themselves over to government forces as SEP. This attempt to 'break down tribalism before the people were ready for it', was regarded by one intelligence officer as the critical factor in turning the tribes against the 'adoo although this did not necessarily translate into wholehearted support for the new Sultan.<sup>38</sup>

By 1972 however, PFLOAG was clearly on the defensive. SEPs, many of whom had held influential positions within the movement, increasingly painted a picture of low unit morale among the 'adoo in particular areas. Until his defection, Ali Salim Tamaan was quarter master for the guerrillas what was termed the Ho Chi Minh sector of operations. His debriefing by Intelligence Corps personnel again revealed hunger to be an increasing problem among the guerrillas with concomitant problems for unit morale. This was further compounded by the growing effectiveness of two further defensive lines – the Hornbeam and later Damavand – which increasingly constrained the ability of the *adoo* to manoeuvre across the Jebel, thereby making them more vulnerable to interception by the SAF.<sup>39</sup> Whether the 'adoo the fell into the hands of SAF were Captured Enemy Personnel (CEPs) or SEPs, they were treated for the most part as Prisoners of War and according to the strictures of the Geneva convention. Given the controversy surrounding the status of insurgents as illegal combatants in Iraq and Afghanistan, this was certainly an enlightened approach. Even so, CEPs were deemed to be 'hard core' by virtue of being captured in battle and as such, were usually kept in isolation from other prisoners while undergoing interrogation. These captives were transferred to the main SAF HQ of Beit al-Falaj, close to Muscat where some were subjected to sleep deprivation. However unpalatable this method now appears in light of more recent events in the Middle East, it was claimed by one informed source that the end justified the means as suspects were soon 'singing like

birds' and giving up valuable information on the structure, methods and personalities of the PFLOAG.<sup>40</sup> Once it was assessed that all relevant information had been extracted, they were handed over to the Omani authorities. Even if suspected of war crimes against tribes on the Jebel, these individuals were tried in civil courts and not by military tribunals. Instigating a process of justice based upon formal application of *Sharia* law in Omani courts placed clear water between the rule of Sultan Qabus and his father, but equally demonstrated that a new dynastic order was willing to use pardons issued through the courts and general amnesties to further entice *'adoo* away from the PFLOAG fold.<sup>41</sup>

It has often been claimed that the real worth of SEP came to be realised in the formation of the *Firqat*, in effect tribal militias that incorporated many SEPs whose intimate knowledge of the physical topography, as well as the eddies of tribal life on the Jebel was deemed invaluable. The size of each *Firqat* was not uniform and could range from anywhere between 30 to 100 tribesmen, operating with their SAS minders alongside the SAF in an overt capacity to help interdict supply routes and lay ambushes and to encourage the Jebalis to rally to the Sultan's cause. Rather than constituting an effective force multiplier however, the true value of the *Firqat* was more psychological, demonstrating to the uncommitted jebali that PFLOAG was in terminal decline and that Dhofaris, alongside Omani Arabs were prepared to nail their colours to the Sultan's mast.<sup>42</sup> The initial attempts at least to cohere the *Firqat* into an effective reconnaissance force were not encouraging however. The original idea had been to recruit mixed units so that 'no one tribe could use the arms and training given to dominate its own part of the Jebel'.<sup>43</sup> Raised and trained by BATT personnel in the coastal village of Marbat, the *Firqat Salahadin*, was soon wracked by internal division as differing tribal allegiances soon emerged. 'Perhaps too much is expected of them', noted the British military attaché for 'they are proud, grasping wayward tribesmen with only inherited native ability and cunning to compensate for a cursory military training.'<sup>44</sup> Over time, this view came to be revised but for one British officer serving on secondment to the SAF in 1975 they remained 'very unreliable', their ultimate allegiance unknown and were prone to change their minds frequently which usually impacted adversely on the conduct of operations that had long been agreed upon.<sup>45</sup>

It soon became clear that if the concept of the *Firqat* was to have any currency, they would have to exist as homogenous units and operate within their own tribal domains.<sup>46</sup> As Captain Alan Abbott, seconded from the Intelligence Corps to work as the resident GSO 3 Dhofar Brigade between 1975 and 1977 noted of his experience of the *Firqat*, ' They were very good for controlling an area once the enemy had left it, but we never got much (or any) hard predictive intelligence from them.<sup>47</sup> It was not unknown for individuals to return back to the enemy fold or if on patrol, to claim a negligent discharge of a round to forewarn any 'adoo in the area - often from their own tribe - of an SAF presence. Concerns were also expressed that these militias should not become an alternative power base across Dhofar all too willing to challenge the SAF and the Sultan himself once PFLOAG had been defeated. By 1972 therefore it was agreed that the total number of tribesman in the *Firqat* should not exceed 700. These suspicions aside, this was also dictated by the cost of arming and equipping such numbers at a time when the SAF was itself undergoing expansion and re-equipment. In truth, the real value of the *Firqat* was perhaps realised in a negative sense; that of providing an outlet for controlling primordial loyalties of SEPs that might still have challenged the dominion of Qabus. But in the case of one such individual, the information he now gave was crucial in preventing the war spreading beyond the confines Dhofar to the north of Oman: Operation Jason.

### A Close Run thing

In October 1972, a SEP identified a suspected PFLOAG member, Mohammed Talib walling through the main souk in Muscat who reported his sighting to his handler, a member of the Intelligence Corps. Placed under surveillance Talib, was eventually arrested and interrogated on 18 December. While at first claiming to have been studying in Beirut, he eventually revealed that he had in fact been in operating in the north of Oman for over a year, preparing a 'second front' in an attempt to relieve pressure on the 'adoo following their severe losses at the Battle of Mirbat in July 1972. He went on to disclose that PFLOAG had established contact with the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG) in Northern Oman whose various cell members both inside Oman and across the border in the UAE numbered over 80 and included Omani



officers serving in the SAF. Large quantities of arms and ammunition had also been smuggled into Oman via the coast that, if distributed to cell members, would have led to a campaign of terror being launched across the north of Oman over the new year period 1972-73.<sup>48</sup> This campaign entailed attacks on commercial and military targets but perhaps of greater importance, the assassination of identified intelligence officials – including seconded Jordanian officers serving in intelligence as well as the SAF - and their contacts. In effect this would have blinded the intelligence effort in northern Oman, making it easier for PFLOAG to ease pressure upon its faltering guerrilla campaign in Dhofar by expanding its struggle across the Sultanate.<sup>49</sup> Much the same tactics had been adopted by the NLF in Aden who had, by 1967, destroyed any effective humint capability the Federal authorities may have once possessed.<sup>50</sup>

On December 23 1972, 'Operation Jason' was launched to apprehend over 40 suspects identified by Talib. Politically, the seconded officers from the Intelligence Corps were taken aback by the social profile of those involved in the NDFLOAG cells. The Omani officers aside, they also included teachers seconded to the SAF, officials of the Oman Gendarmarie.<sup>51</sup> Another member of the cell was revealed as the been the driver to the director of the OIS, Brigadier Malcolm Dennison. As such DIOs and Intelligence Corps personnel involved in the arrests deliberately withheld details of Operation Jason from their OIS colleagues fearing the widespread penetration of the service. Opposition to a dynastic order dependent upon British tutelage, rather than any avowed support for a new Socialist order provided the dominant rationale for many to align themselves with PFLOAG.

The British Ambassador to Muscat, Donald Hawley, impressed upon the Foreign Secretary Douglas-Home how 'close run' the discovery of the organisation had been. Indeed, it had been happenstance rather than patient counter-intelligence work that had uncovering the network and alerted authorities in Muscat to the attempt by PFLOAG to expand the war beyond the Dhofar. As Hawley noted, 'Oman's own intelligence organisation urgently requires strengthening on the civil side'.<sup>52</sup> Such sentiment certainly echoed the views of new CSAF, Major General Timothy Creasy who noted that the sheer numbers rounded up under 'Operation Jason' lay beyond the limited ability of either the OIS or indeed the SAF to interrogate effectively or indeed efficiently.<sup>53</sup>

Creasy now turned to London for help in supplying the requisite expertise and equipment needed to undertake interrogations. This request caused much inter-departmental soul-searching in Whitehall, the FCO proving reluctant to allow British Service personnel on secondment to the SAF to become involved in actual interrogations. This sensitivity was informed by recent disclosures surrounding British interrogation techniques in Northern Ireland and the desire by the Heath Government to ensure that London's support for the Sultan remained as discreet as possible. The FCO were only too aware however that such a request could only have been made with the blessing of the Sultan and to withdraw or withhold British expertise would be damaging to Anglo-Omani Relations.<sup>54</sup> As one official noted, if meeting requests for such aid by the Sultan fell short of participation in 'interrogation procedures which we ourselves are using in Northern Ireland', it would by default question the moral efficacy of those self-same methods being used by the British in Ulster.<sup>55</sup>

In a telegram sent on 4 January 1973 Hawley went some way to qualify the nature of the support sought by the CSAF. Creasy wanted two officers from the Intelligence Corps sent to Muscat to collate and administer information gleaned from the interrogations, assistance that would help expedite a more integrated appreciation of the PFLOAG/NDFLOAG structure without having to rely on the sparse number of SIOs upon whom already heavy demands were already being made in Dhofar.<sup>56</sup> Douglas-Home initially balked at the request, suggesting instead that the Saudis or Iranians be called upon to conduct the interrogations. This in turn provoked Hawley to remind him that the methods of the Saudis were 'notorious', in sharp contrast to those methods employed by British seconded and contract officers which were described by the British military attaché to Muscat, Colonel Courtney Welch as being 'conducted in a most gentlemanly manner'. In a despatch to London on 6 January, Welch noted that while much information had been gleaned from those arrested, details of PFLOAG contacts in other countries and future intention had 'not been forthcoming'. He continued:

If the Omani security authorities and this means SAF are to capitalise on this important break through against subversion/armed revolt, then the missing information that an interrogation centre with its proper system of questioning, recording, collating can produce could be critical. For instance, we know pistols were brought in with the arms. None of these have been recovered. We believe they have been distributed. Imagine the furore if

one or two are used by PFLOAG hotheads to assassinate Europeans in the Muttrah suq....If the war in Dhofar is to be prosecuted successfully, the North Oman must be kept quiet at this moment. A second front here could bring SAF to its literal knees with unfortunate repercussions, the least of which would be a request for more British aid. <sup>57</sup>

In the event, the Defence Secretary, Lord Carrington, approved the request for loan personal to help with the administration of the interrogation centre and to initiate Omani officers in British interrogation techniques. The loan agreement was finite however, it being restricted to a period of just one month. <sup>58</sup> Even so, the arrest of further conspirators soon after in the UAE suggests that the loan of these British intelligence officers was crucial to forestalling any recrudescence of PFLOAG cells in north Oman and beyond. <sup>59</sup> Forty of those arrested in the initial stages of Operation Jason were sentenced to death after a brief trial. Of that number, 22 had their sentences commuted to various terms of imprisonment. The rest, including six army officers were all executed by firing squad on three consecutive days in late June 1973. Such efficient, if bloody expression of Omani justice was in marked contrast to the fortuitous circumstances that had led to the discovery of the conspirators. Indeed, after 'Operation Jason', Military Intelligence came to exercise increasing influence across the nascent intelligence structures of the Sultanate that by 1975 (see appendix 1), had as much to do with ensuring the future longevity of the al-Bu-Said dynasty as ensuring the successful prosecution of the COIN campaign in Dhofar.

## Conclusion

Drawing exact parallels between the conduct of recent COIN campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan with events in Dhofar and Oman over three decades ago should be avoided. After all, it was an insurgency out of the sight and mind of a global audience, contained within a relatively small area, rural for the most part in nature and where coherence marked alliance politics between London and Muscat. Even so, its echoes still have a discernible resonance. Understanding the tension between support derived from preference or attitude, an support derived from contextual behaviour among a target population, knowing both how to exploit that support as well as the limits of exploitation, and how in turn how the information derived can and should determine the role and use of

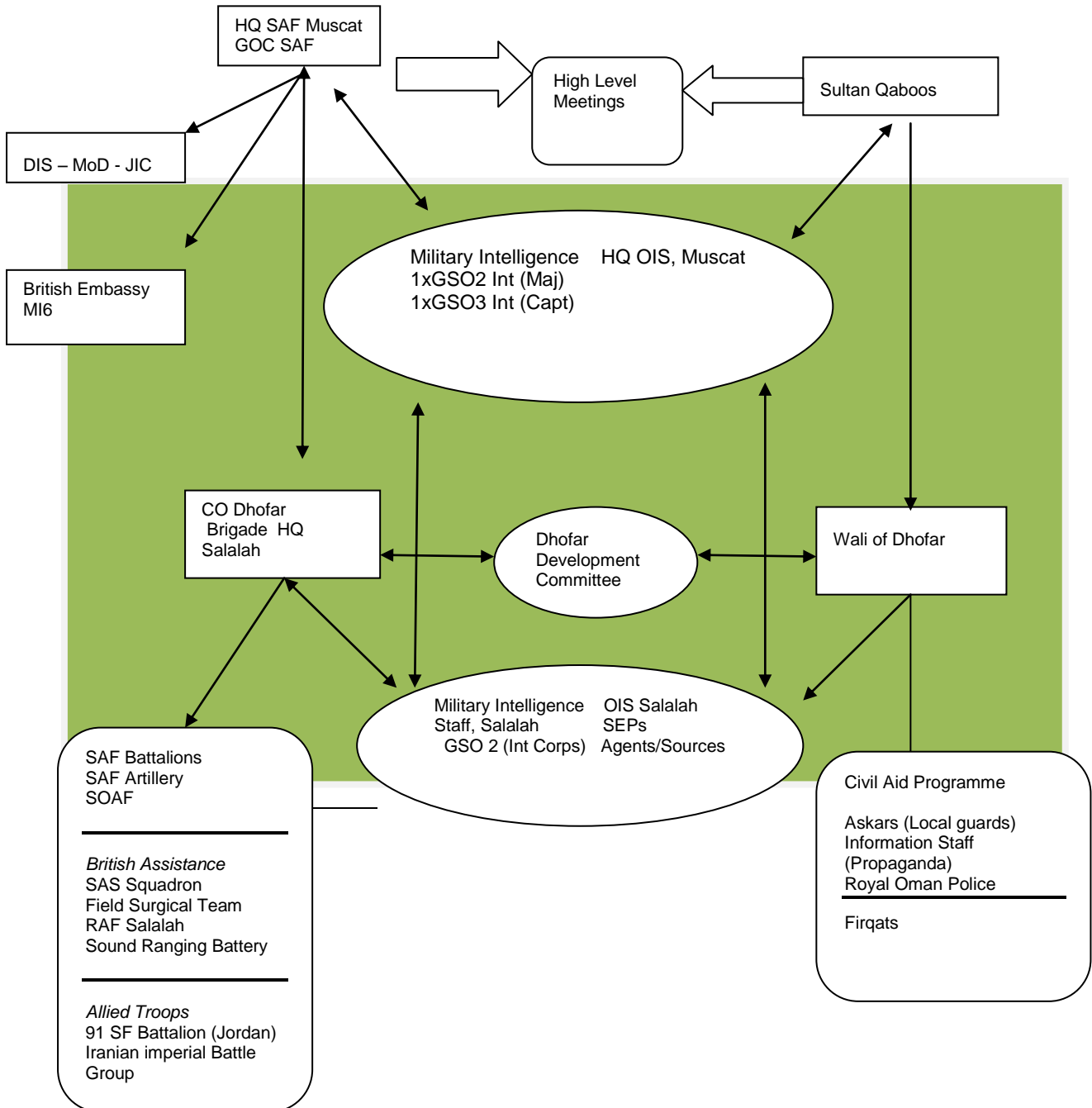
intelligence provides a contemporary compass of sorts when the contours of good governance remain conspicuous by their absence.

In Dhofar, suborning the tribes was crucial to the survival of a dynastic order that had, before 1970, increasingly alienated itself from the very structures it needed to survive, let alone endure. In its ability to connect with the tribal terrain and free from the lassitude of a styptic regime, military intelligence played an important role, hitherto overlooked, in ensuring both the acceptance and longer term legitimacy of the Sultanate across Dhofar. The influence of military intelligence in this conflict was often personal, the links between some SIOs and 'Freds' in particular developing a bond that went beyond the purely instrumental. But perhaps the final word on any lessons learnt should be left to Lt Col. Alan Abbott who served as the intelligence officer for Dhofar Brigade between 1975-1977. Reflecting on his experience he noted that:

[T]he nature of the political and military threat changes very quickly. Hence, what one person thinks was important during one tour of duty can seem alien, or less relevant to someone on a different tour a year later. Of course you have to derive lessons, but on operations you always have to think forwards not backwards. But the human and geographic landscape does not change. The value of understanding the local tribal society (alongside the nature of the ground and the importance of logistics) were lessons learnt [previously] in Aden, Radfan the Jebel Akhdar campaigns. I think that this is the abiding aspect worth focusing on, rather than trying to draw transitory lessons from particular battles fought 20,10, 5 or even one year earlier.<sup>60</sup>

# Appendix 1

## Intelligence Chain of Command, Oman & Dhofar 1976



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<sup>1</sup> Tony Jeapes, *SAS Secret War: Codename Operation Storm* (London: Harper Collins, 1996); Tony Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: The SAS from 1950-1980* (London: Little Brown, 1992). Not all who served in an intelligence capacity in Dhofar had a high opinion of the SAS. Alan Abbott, who served as a GSO3 (Int) in the mid-1970s noted that 'Although excellent fighters they (the SAS) antagonised the OIS (Oman Intelligence Service) by (allegedly) taking planeloads of captured weapons as booty back to Herford in the early days of the campaign'. Such activities undermined a potential source of intelligence derived from weapons analysis. Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-77 under Brigadier John Akehurst.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Lt.Col Jon Hawkins, 'Assessing Afghanistan Against Aden and Oman', *Australian Army Journal*, 7/1 (2010), pp.10-13; BRITISH ARMY Field Manuel Countering Insurgency, Vol. 1 – Part 10: January 2010.

<sup>3</sup> See Dale F.Eickelman and M.G. Dennison, 'Arabizing the Omani Intelligence Services: Clash of Cultures?', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 7/1 (1994), pp.1-28.

<sup>4</sup> Durham University Library Special collections: Papers of Sir Donald Hawley, HAW 14/8/1-134 (Official Correspondence January – April 1974), Letter from Donald Hawley to Lt. Col N. B. Knocker (MoD) 16 January 1974. See also Skeet, *Oman: Politics and Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.48.

<sup>5</sup> Durham University Library Special collections: Papers of Sir Donald Hawley, HAW 14/1/30, From Brigadier JDC Graham OBE to Colonel HRD Oldman OBE MC. 'Personal in Confidence', 29 July 1972,

<sup>6</sup> A vivid description of the appalling social conditions endured by Omanis during this period can be found in John Townsend, *Oman: the Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm, 1974). The failure of Sultan Said bin Taimur to redress the many socio-economic ills of his country was fully recognised by intelligence officers. One DIO declared that, "He[bin Taimur] is fiddling while Rome burns and no one will change him". See Dale F.Eickelman and M.G. Dennison, 'Arabizing the Omani Intelligence Services: Clash of Cultures?', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 7/1 (1994), pp.8-9.

<sup>7</sup> The political agenda of the PFLOAG has been the subject of a number of studies. For two conflicting views see Fred Halliday, *Arabia without the Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), and J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Harper Collins, 1980), pp.104-63.

<sup>8</sup> Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p.76.

<sup>9</sup> Middle East Archive, St Anthony's College, Oxford. File GB165-0336: 'Report of tenure of Command of SAF by Col. D.de C. Smiley from April 1958 to March 1961.

<sup>10</sup> FCO 8/1422, Confidential: from J.M Ides to P.H.H Wright, 'Oman State Office in Italy', 19 March 1970. In this memo, it was stated clearly that 'The Arabian peninsula and the Gulf are vital to Western Europe. Since much of our oil comes from there ... [the] stability in Oman is essential to the area as a whole.

<sup>11</sup> POWE /63/449 (JIC (68) 24), JIC Report on the Implications of Oil Supplies and British Oil interests in the Middle East), 9 September 1968. Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies: British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst, 2013), pp.180-181.

<sup>12</sup> General Sir Michael Rose, 'Counter Insurgency Warfare: Lessons from the Past', *The Journal of the SAF Association*, Issue No.59 (March 2010), p.68.

<sup>13</sup> For such an account see Tony Jeapes, *SAS Secret War: Codename Operation Storm* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

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- <sup>14</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.753. Report of SIO Dhofar Salalah 15<sup>th</sup> February 1972.
- <sup>15</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (New York: Cambridge University press, 2006), pp.87-110.
- <sup>16</sup> Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-77 under Brigadier John Akehurst.
- <sup>17</sup> The failure of Sultan Said bin Taimur to redress the many socio-economic ills of his country was fully recognised by a senior British intelligence officer, working for 'G2Int', the Sultan's Intelligence service. In a cable to his superiors just prior to the Palace coup, this intelligence officer declared that, "He[bin Taimur] is fiddling while Rome burns and no one will change him". See D.F Eickelman and M.G Dennison, 'Arabizing the Omani Intelligence Services: Clash of Cultures', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, 7/1(1994), pp.8-9.
- <sup>18</sup> See Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (London: University of California Press, 2008), pp.1-8.
- <sup>19</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.1140. Papers of Major D.J.Venn Intelligence Corps (November 1971 – November 1972) GSO 3 Operations and Intelligence.
- <sup>20</sup> Eickelman and Dennison, p.8.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Eickelman and Dennison, pp.9-10. See also Dale F. Eickelmann, 'Intelligence in an Arab Gulf State', in Roy Godson (ed), *Comparing Foreign Intelligence* (London: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), pp.107-8.
- <sup>22</sup> See for example Peter Thwaites, *Muscat Command* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995), pp.20-21. Thwaites reveals that because of the suspicions of Sultan bin Taimur, he neutered the efforts of his DIO, Bob Brown to provide accurate operational intelligence to SAF troops fighting on the Jebel Dhofar.
- <sup>23</sup> NA/DEFE 25/186 Secret: From Secretary For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the Secretary of State for Defence, 'Special Air Service (SAS Assistance to the Sultanate of Oman), 4 September 1970.
- <sup>24</sup> NA/DEFE 25/186. Secret: SAS Assistance in the Sultanate of Oman, 17 August 1970. The original intelligence section deployed with the BATT was WO2 Bill Birrel, WO2 Bill Capper, Cpl David Duncan, L/Cpl Joe Davis, L/Cpl Pete Davis.
- <sup>25</sup> An account of the Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces (January 1971 – August 1972), by Captain D.J.Venn, Intelligence Corps, GSO3 Operations and Intelligence Headquarters, Dhofar. (Unpublished), p.13. As time went on these leaflets came to target particular vulnerabilities faced by the 'adoo. For example, leaflets came to extol the virtues of medical facilities set up by BATT along the coastal plain, knowing full well that many 'adoo suffered from malaria.
- <sup>26</sup> See John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1982), p.28; ICMA/Oman: Accession No:748. Brief notes on conclusion of loan service tour in Sultanate of Oman (ORD) January-May 1979 by W.M.W Jackson.
- <sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Lt. Col. Alan Abbott MBE for pointing out the importance of weapons analysis.
- <sup>28</sup> An account of the Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces (January 1971 – August 1972), by Captain D.J.Venn, Intelligence Corps, GSO3 Operations and Intelligence Headquarters, Dhofar. (Unpublished), p.10.
- <sup>29</sup> Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-77 under Brigadier John Akehurst. Point 5.

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<sup>30</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.1140. Papers of Major D.J Venn, Intelligence Corps (November 1971-72 GSO3 Ops and Intelligence). Email correspondence with Brigadier David Venn, 7 May 2009.

<sup>31</sup> An account of the Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces (January 1971 – August 1972), by Captain D.J.Venn, Intelligence Corps, GSO3 Operations and Intelligence Headquarters, Dhofar. (Unpublished), pp.23-4. The Riyal Saidi was replaced by the Omani riyal in 1973.

<sup>32</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.753. ' From SIO Dhofar, Salalah. Subject Food Supplies ', 15 February 1972. Reliability of a source was denoted by a letter and numeral suffix. For example C6 meant 'source fairly reliable but information provided could not be judged', while B2 was 'source usually reliable, information probably true.

<sup>33</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.94. Papers of WO2 S.H Ravens. The Intelligence Corps cell produced a 'Defector and Prisoner of War Debrief Report, in essence a 25 point questionnaire for each SEP. Aside from the normal name, tribe, age and unit, it included questions on training, foreign aid, intelligence, communications, attitudes of the population towards the guerrillas, re-supply routes and so forth.

<sup>34</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession Ref ' Intelligence Report Camel Train Movements: INT/13 List 'C' JAN/FEB 72 – Int Cell DHOFAR', 18 February 1972.

<sup>35</sup> ICMA/Oman : Accession Ref ' Intelligence Report Camel Train Movements: INT/13 List 'C' JAN/FEB 72 – Int Cell DHOFAR', 18 February 1972.

<sup>36</sup> See [www.britains-small-wars.com/Desert\\_song/Hearts.htm](http://www.britains-small-wars.com/Desert_song/Hearts.htm) Accessed on 1 October 2010. Even so, such projects were crucial statements of physical intent. However incremental, such projects should not be judged only in volume, but impact relative to the size of the population. Because the population was small on the Jebel the magnitude of the impact was relatively high, making it hard for the 'adoo to compete for behavioural support.

<sup>37</sup> Peterson, pp.251-253.

<sup>38</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No. 2782. Papers of Lieutenant Colonel Mike Jackson.

<sup>39</sup> ICMA/Oman: Accession No.753. ' Second Debrief Report for Ali Salim Tamaan – SEP 360, Intelligence Cell, Dhofar (Ref: INT/8/6) 6 January 1972.

<sup>40</sup> Email correspondence with British Army Colonel (retired) 3 June 2010. Name withheld on request.

<sup>41</sup> ICMA /Oman : Accession No.904. Warrant Officer Steve Ravens, Defector and Prisoner of War Debrief Report

<sup>42</sup> An account of the Secondment to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces (January 1971 – August 1972), by Captain D.J.Venn, Intelligence Corps, GSO3 Operations and Intelligence Headquarters, Dhofar. (Unpublished), p.17.

<sup>43</sup> ICMA/Oman. Irregular forces – SAF view: Origin and Formation of the Firqats(sic). (Undated)

<sup>44</sup> NA/FCO 8/2233/337937. Secret: From Col. C.E Welch. Defence Attaché Report, British Embassy Muscat, 29 November 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Imperial War Museum Sound Recording 22124, David Mason Reel 2. See also ICMA/Oman (undated Irregular forces – SAF view: Origin and Formation of the Firqats(sic). In this report, it was noted of the Firqa that they are 'Completely unreliable and unpredictable. [They] argue over what to do, usually end up doing



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nothing and will seize the slightest excuse such as rain, sickness, family trouble to avoid an operation. After weeks of this sort of behaviour the same men are very likely to rush off without prompting and conduct a successful raid. Such raids may be to rescue a family member or to rustle cattle.

<sup>46</sup> Some 11 Firqa units operated with BATTs by 1972. These ranged in size from about 25 tribesmen in the case of the *Firqa Salahadin* to 140 in the *Firqa Khalid bin Walid* who recruited mainly from the Bayt Maasheni tribe.

<sup>47</sup> Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-77 under Brigadier John Akehurst, point 4. Firqats.

<sup>48</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: From D.F Hawley, British Embassy Muscat to P.R.H Wright, Middle East Department FCO, 'PFLOAG Plot', 15 January 1973.

<sup>49</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047, Top Secret: From Major General Timothy Creasy to His Majesty Qaboos bin Said, Annex "C", Organisation and Future Intentions of PFLOAG in Northern Oman, 4 January 1973.

<sup>50</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047, Secret: Brief on Operation Jason for Distribution to Ministers and Embassies; FCO 8/2018 338047, Top Secret: From Major General Timothy Creasy to His Majesty Qaboos bin Said, Annex "C", Organisation and Future Intentions of PFLOAG in Northern Oman, 4 January 1973.

<sup>51</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: Letter from Donald Hawley, British Embassy Muscat to P.H.R Wright, Middle East Department FCO, Subject: PFLOAG plot, 15 January 1973.

<sup>52</sup> DEFE 25/186. Confidential: Covert letter accompanying report of Defence attaché Col. Welch from Donald Hawley to Alec Douglas-Home, 14 January 1973.

<sup>53</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047, Top Secret: From Major General Timothy Creasy to His Majesty Qaboos bin Said, 4 January 1973, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: From P.R.H Wright to Mr Le Quesne, Subject: Oman – Request for Interrogation Team, 4 January 1973

<sup>55</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: From C.M Le Quesne to Mr Coles, 10 January 1973.

<sup>56</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: Telegram From Muscat to FCO: Subject PFLOAG, 4 January 1973.

<sup>57</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: Telegram From Defence attaché Muscat to MODUK, 6 January 1973.

<sup>58</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Secret: Telegram from FCO to Muscat, 16 January 1973.

<sup>59</sup> FCO 8/2018 338047 Confidential: Telegram from British Embassy Dubai to FCO, Muscat, Doha, Bahrain, Kuwait, 24 January 1973.

<sup>60</sup> Personal notes: Lessons Learnt by Lt Col (Retd) Alan Abbott, Int Corps MBE, GSO 3 Int, HQ Dhofar Brigade, On Loan Service in 1975-77 under Brigadier John Akehurst, point 27: History.

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