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**Military loyalty in Britain's withdrawal from Aden, 1960-1967.**

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## **Military loyalty in Britain's withdrawal from Aden, 1960-1967.**

This article argues an understanding of the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967 requires greater attention to be paid to the loyalty of the local security forces who were supposed to help repress the insurgency in south Arabia, and then secure a friendly state when Britain left. The Federal Regular Army (FRA), the most important formation, proved to be consistently unreliable through behaviours ranging from the attempted murder of British personnel, to desertion and political activism. However, disbanding the FRA might have made matters even worse, so British officers sought to manipulate its loyalty through various mechanisms, including pay rises, ignoring disloyal incidents and directing propaganda at the soldiers. These endeavours succeeded in holding off a mutiny until June 1967, but only by creating a force which became infiltrated by the insurgent movements and lacked the capacity to play any meaningful role in defending the federation. This analysis suggests studies on British counter-insurgency should investigate further the role of local allies in strategy and operations.

Keywords: Aden; counter-insurgency; decolonisation; loyalism; defence policy.

When the last troops departed Aden on 29 November 1967, all the efforts put into creating the type of post-independence federal government favoured by Britain's colonial dismantlers crumbled into civil war. The violent exit from Aden or, properly speaking, the Federation of South Arabia, has attracted less scholarly attention than the empire's end in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus. Events in South Arabia are usually addressed only insofar as they related to the decisions, taken between 1964 and 1968, to withdraw from the major military bases at

Aden and Singapore. Labour won the 1964 general election promising to end colonialism and reduce defence expenditure. The East of Suez withdrawal decisions derived from financial, military and party political pressures on Harold Wilson's Cabinet.<sup>1</sup> Though the decisions were multi-dimensional and cumulative, the existing literature concentrates principally on economics, particularly Labour's aim to cut defence expenditure by nearly 16 per cent.<sup>2</sup> The economic imperatives were overbearing, compelling a further £100 million cut in the defence budget, for example, amidst the November 1967 sterling devaluation crisis.<sup>3</sup>

This article expands our understanding about the military aspects of the retreat from Aden. Doing so is necessary not only to shed light on the least studied factor in a defining episode in Britain's post-war defence history. There is also a requirement to challenge a stab in the back myth, first articulated by disgruntled officials in the late 1960s, reborn in recent years in scholarly form, and lodged in the British Army's official doctrine. Some officials and officers who served in Aden reacted to departure as a betrayal which might have been avoided with sufficient determination to crush the insurgency.<sup>4</sup> For Clive Jones, departure snatched defeat "from the jaws of military victory" as Egyptian support for the insurgency began to wane.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Walker has decried London's "political ineptitude".<sup>6</sup> Aaron Edwards calls withdrawal a "self-inflicted wound".<sup>7</sup> British Army doctrine claims the Labour government "let British

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<sup>1</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 2: Labour's Foreign Policy Since 1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 58, 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 104.

<sup>3</sup> John Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, Volume 2: International Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 31, 35-38, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson, 1968); Colin Mitchell, *Having Been a Soldier* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965. Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 216.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in South Arabia 1962-1967* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2005), xix.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Edwards, *Defending the Realm? The politics of Britain's small wars since 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 178.

forces in the area down" by withdrawing before the local security forces could be strengthened to handle the insurgency on their own.<sup>8</sup> These accounts propose that a more vigorous military campaign could have allowed Britain to remain in Aden beyond 1967. They ignore the effect of the September 1962 Yemeni revolution in mobilising nationalism throughout the peninsula, and the repeated failure of attempts to quash rebellion in the countryside by force.<sup>9</sup>

Defence Secretary Denis Healey recalled "the presence of British troops was becoming an irritant rather than a stabilising factor."<sup>10</sup> As the benefits accruing from the base facilities in Aden were outweighed by the efforts required to defend them, ministers decided in June 1965 to withdraw.<sup>11</sup> This insight supports Spencer Mawby's emphasis on "changes in the periphery" in explaining policy.<sup>12</sup> Those changes also rippled through the locally-recruited security forces, whose significance forces has been neglected.<sup>13</sup> Formations like the Federal Regular Army and the Federal National Guard mattered because the British Army lacked the personnel to fight a major counter-insurgency on its own. The 1957 defence review ended conscription, creating a new force structure which expected colonial governments to generate their own police and military units to deal with internal security. As the insurgency in south Arabia worsened, defence planners could not easily re-allocate troops from the British Army of the Rhine whilst the government attempted to persuade West Germany to subsidise their presence.

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<sup>8</sup> British Army, *Army Field Manual Volume 1 Part 10: Countering Insurgency* (Warminster: Land Warfare Centre, 2009), CS4-4.

<sup>9</sup> Asher Orkaby, 'The North Yemen civil war and the failure of the Federation of South Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 53/1 (2017), 69-83; Spencer Mawby, 'From Tribal Rebellions to Revolution: British Counter-Insurgency Operations in Southwest Arabia 1955-1967', *Electronic Journal of International History*, 5 (2000), accessed online 16 February 2023 at: [https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3392/1/Journal\\_of\\_International\\_History\\_2000\\_n5\\_Mawby.pdf](https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/3392/1/Journal_of_International_History_2000_n5_Mawby.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 280.

<sup>11</sup> William D. James, 'Global Britain's strategic problem East of Suez', *European Journal of International Security*, 6 (2021), 173, 176.

<sup>12</sup> Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67: Last outpost of a Middle East empire* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Rob Johnson, *True to Their Salt: Indigenous Personnel in Western Armed Forces* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 302.

In March 1966 France left NATO's military command structure, making British re-deployments outside Europe even more difficult.<sup>14</sup> This article asks how British strategists understood and attempted to manage the loyalty of locally-recruited security forces, focusing on the most important force, the Federal Regular Army. In June 1967 the five-battalion strong FRA was merged with the four battalions of Federal Guard 1 to form the new South Arabian Army.<sup>15</sup>

The existing literature offers few insights. Most attention has fallen on the dramatic events of 20 June 1967, when the Aden Armed Police and the South Arabian Army mutinied, killing 22 British soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Caused by resentment at the manner in which the Army had been created, discontent with the commander, and suspicions about British support for Israel in the Six Day War, the mutiny precipitated the federation's collapse.<sup>17</sup> Stab in the back accounts claim the mutiny happened because the British announced their departure in February 1966 (without explaining the 16 month interval between the two events). Aside from this episode little is known about the local security forces. Colonel Julian Paget, who advised the High Commissioner, argued the army and police were somewhat sympathetic to the insurgents, and infiltrated by them.<sup>18</sup> David French argues the federal forces were swayed by Egyptian and Yemeni radio propaganda, becoming "thoroughly penetrated" to the extent that, by autumn 1965, Federal Regular Army units performed their duties "in at best a half-hearted manner". A year later federal soldiers could be found throwing grenades at the British.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244-245, 287-288.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Walker, 'The South Arabian Army - A Poisoned Chalice?', in Noel Brehony and Clive Jones (eds.), *Britain's Departure from Aden and South Arabia: Without Glory but Without Disaster* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2020), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden 1964-67* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 213-223; Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, 239-258.

<sup>17</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 168-169.

<sup>18</sup> Paget, *Last Post*, 186.

<sup>19</sup> David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 185-186.

This article makes two arguments, based on original archival findings. Firstly, the Federal Regular Army's persistent disloyalty informed the British decision in 1965 to depart from Aden. Once that decision had been taken, the government's objectives became an orderly military withdrawal and excluding Egyptian allies from the post-independence government.<sup>20</sup> These goals depended upon the local security forces remaining intact and refraining from turning on the British Army. The article's second argument is that the British military authorities monitored and regulated the Federal Regular Army's loyalty sufficiently well to stave off a mutiny until as late as 1967, but only by creating a force unable to play any significant part in fighting the insurgency. The article proceeds in three sections. The first section analyses the various manifestations of military disloyalty, and the implications drawn by senior defence leaders around the date of the withdrawal decision. The second section analyses the ways in which British officers interpreted the foundations of loyalty and the threats to it as the insurgency intensified. Finally, in the third section, the article examines the counter-measures devised to promote loyalty and assesses the degree to which they proved efficacious. In sum, the British authorities distrusted their local uniformed allies but believed them to be manipulable, an assumption based on wishful thinking more than any firm evidence.

### **Inconsistent loyalty**

Mutinies such as that in Aden in 1967 are only the most extreme manifestations of disobedience by ordinary soldiers, which can be found in all militaries to varying degrees.<sup>21</sup> Defence policy-makers needed to make judgements about the likely future reliability of the Federal Regular Army, as the most important local military partner. Before and after the 1965 decision to

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<sup>20</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 176.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Hundman, 'The Diversity of Disobedience in Military Organizations', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6/4 (2021), 2.

withdraw the army's loyalty proved inconsistent. On 29 November 1961 the Aden Protectorate Levies, established in 1928, transformed into the Federal Army of the Federation of the Amirates of the South.<sup>22</sup> The force's very first security report, covering the second half of 1961, found "openly voiced doubts" about the new federation, and noted "It remains to be seen if this lack of loyalty will have any effect on the carrying out of Federal policies."<sup>23</sup>

Combat motivation theories explain why soldiers fight and, conversely, how disintegration occurs in wartime.<sup>24</sup> Though the universal validity of concepts created for Western militaries has been questioned, rigorous studies on combat motivation sensitive to the cultural contexts in colonial armies have been written.<sup>25</sup> These works depend on knowledge created by colonial soldiers - letters, diaries, oral testimonies - to assess their fighting spirit, or dissent. Such sources are unavailable for the Federal Regular Army. Consequently, this article addresses British perceptions about loyalty, rather than making claims about motivations extricable from the colonial gaze. Mutiny is a dirty word for professional soldiers nourished on conceptions of duty.<sup>26</sup> Instances of disobedience of this kind and others are therefore likely to have been under-reported by officers commenting on, amongst other things, their own leadership shortcomings. The problem is exacerbated in the Aden case by the complete removal of military justice files from the archives. Nevertheless, evidence for four types of military disobedience survives in the Federal Regular Army's record: murder (attempted or successful), desertion, refusal to re-enlist, and foot dragging on operations.

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<sup>22</sup> Frank Edwards, *The Gaysh: A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies 1927-61 and the Federal Regular Army of South Arabia 1961-67* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2004), 10, 144.

<sup>23</sup> British Library, India Office Records [hereafter 'BL'], IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Army Half Yearly Security Report', 11 January 1962.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>25</sup> Tarak Barkawi, 'Decolonising war', *European Journal of International Security*, 1/2 (2016), 199-214; Michelle R. Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014); Tarak Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Elihu Rose, 'The Anatomy of Mutiny', *Armed Forces and Society*, 8/4 (1982), 561-563.

The 1967 mutiny was not the only time soldiers attempted to kill their comrades. During the Vietnam War several hundred "fragging" incidents, named after the fragmentation grenades often used by assailants, took place in the US Army and the Marines Corps. Most attacks happened in non-combat support units away from the fighting.<sup>27</sup> This appears to have been common in south Arabia too. Before federation, in the second half of 1960, a soldier shot and wounded Captain Brown whilst deserting, the only explanation being that he was "a rather brooding and introspective type."<sup>28</sup> On 18 September 1965 Major Mike Pearman, commanding the 1st FRA garrison at Mukeiras, was shot dead during a walk outside the base, his escort having fled the scene with the same calibre of rifle implicated in his death.<sup>29</sup> Colonel David Warren served in the FRA from 1964-66 in Beihan. On his last night in camp the Arab officers organised a farewell party. As he arrived a group approached him from the local Emir to warn an Arab officer intended to shoot him dead, "a rather unhappy situation". Warren moved the party into the British Army officers' mess, surrounded by an armed guard.<sup>30</sup>

From September 1964 explosive devices began to be planted inside federal and British bases, including the FRA camp in Dhala in September, the RAF radar station at Mukeiras in November, and at the British sergeants' mess in the FRA camp in Mukeiras in April 1965.<sup>31</sup> Only personnel with a security pass could enter the camps. In June a receptionist working at the Joint Services Officers' Mess in Aden blew himself up while laying explosives under the

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<sup>27</sup> George Lepre, *Fragging: Why U.S. Soldiers Assaulted Their Officers in Vietnam* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 19-60.

<sup>28</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereafter 'TNA'] WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 14 February 1961.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *The Gaysh*, 169.

<sup>30</sup> Imperial War Museum Sound Archive [hereafter IWMSA]: David John Warren, catalogue number 13041, reel 3.

<sup>31</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/219: 'Federal Intelligence Summary', 27 September 1964, 15 November 1964, 3 May 1965.

dining room floor.<sup>32</sup> The day before a bomb went off at the British corporals' mess in the FRA camp in Mukeiras, wounding one man. Insurgents fired a Blindicide rocket at the intelligence officer's compound in the camp - an attack likely based on insider knowledge.<sup>33</sup> These sorts of attacks appear to have intensified after the British government announced the withdrawal from Aden in February 1966, and were facilitated by British and FRA troops sharing bases. In June 1966 an FRA soldier at Mukeiras blew himself up planting a pressure mine outside the British soldiers' quarters. In a move seen by Major-General Willoughby, commanding Middle East Land Forces, as deliberately insubordinate, the Arab FRA commanding officer gave the soldiers who best knew the bomber four days' leave for the burial.<sup>34</sup> After several grenade attacks on British messes in late 1966, 1st Royal Horse Artillery moved out from their joint camp with 3rd FRA in Beihan to a safer, separate base.<sup>35</sup>

After the attempted killing of comrades, desertion, "leaving an armed group entirely, before an agreed term of service expires", represented the most serious indicator of military disintegration.<sup>36</sup> Colonel Chaplin, Permanent Secretary at the federal defence ministry, believed a marked increase in desertions to be an early warning sign for further problems.<sup>37</sup> Initially, a certain complacency about desertions lingered from the Aden Protectorate Levies into the FRA. The security report for the first half of 1962 stated there had been 440 desertions since 1957 without any follow-up action having been taken. However, the next report described this as "largely a paper figure". The number of outstanding deserters was thought to

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<sup>32</sup> Imperial War Museum Documents [hereafter IWMD]: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entry for 20 June 1965.

<sup>33</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/219: 'Federal Intelligence Summary', 21 June 1965.

<sup>34</sup> IWMD: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entries for 22 and 24 June 1966.

<sup>35</sup> IWMSA: David Alan Talbot Baines, catalogue number 20062, reel 5.

<sup>36</sup> Theodore McLaughlin, *Desertion: Trust and Mistrust in Civil Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 19.

<sup>37</sup> TNA CO 968/806: Letter from Colonel J.E. Chaplin, Federal Ministry of Defence, to Lt-Gen. Sir Charles Harington, Middle East Command [hereafter 'MEC'], 28 October 1965.

be no more than 150.<sup>38</sup> Desertions were generally held to occur for family reasons.<sup>39</sup> Four soldiers from 2nd FRA apparently deserted in May 1963, for example, to go home for Eid.<sup>40</sup> Whether such cases should be categorised as temporary absences without leave, where the soldier eventually returned to duty, is unclear. There could be other prosaic motivations. Junior officer Umar Ahmad deserted with the unit payroll of £9,000 in cash.<sup>41</sup>

The revolution in Yemen in September 1962 prompted an upswing in desertions from the FRA by soldiers going to join the republican forces fighting the royalist regime. By November around 2,000 people from the Western Aden Protectorate had crossed into Yemen for this purpose, alongside 20 FRA soldiers. In addition, 17 non-combatant enlistments (support service personnel) deserted, nearly half from the RAF Hospital, perhaps because "the hospital staff contains a greater proportion of sophisticated, and therefore politically conscious Arabs."<sup>42</sup> The flow of volunteers across the border bore some relation to the war's fortunes, around 575 Western Aden Protectorate inhabitants making the journey in March 1963 following republican battlefield successes, although a "significant number" returned home by early May.<sup>43</sup> The High Commissioner's Office thought financial rewards accounted for most decisions to follow the Yemeni cause, rather than any ideological motivation, though there does not appear to have been any foundation for the assumption.<sup>44</sup> Desertions also tended to be provoked by offensive operations in the areas where soldiers were recruited from. Operation Nutcracker was launched in January 1964 in the Radfan region. One soldier from the area

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<sup>38</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Half Yearly Security Report', 1 June 1962; 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>39</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 14 February 1961; BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Half Yearly Security Report', 11 January 1962.

<sup>40</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/37: 'Joint Intelligence Committee Middle East. Weekly Intelligence Review', 10 May 1963.

<sup>41</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/219: 'Federal Intelligence Summary', 6 April 1965.

<sup>42</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>43</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/37: 'Joint Intelligence Committee Middle East. Weekly Intelligence Review', 15 March 1963, 3 May 1963.

<sup>44</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/41: 'The High Commissioner's Office. Monthly Report for August, 1963'.

went absent from his unit, only to return after checking on his family.<sup>45</sup> A small number of desertions continued during the Radfan operations: three soldiers in March, and then the crew of a Ferret armoured scout car with the vehicle in early May.<sup>46</sup>

Desertion is known to hinge on the physical opportunity to abscond. A study on the Syrian civil war finds: "Family, friends, and close home-town connections are crucial in turning disaffection into desertion by activating norms of trust that help convince soldiers that desertion is an acceptable behavior."<sup>47</sup> These logics may have pertained in South Arabia. A spate of desertions arose after 3rd FRA arrived at the Ain garrison in April 1963, close to the Yemeni town of Harib. Between 1-5 May, two corporals and four privates deserted. The commanding officer thought Sheikh Muqbil and other West Aden Protectorate "malcontents" living in Harib persuaded them to defect.<sup>48</sup> Private Mohammed Hussain Hagaily voluntarily returned to 3rd FRA disillusioned by his four-day spell in Harib. Wakil Qaid (Major) Mohammed Abdullah Audhali and Lieutenant G. Coxon discovered, during interrogation, Hagaily decided upon desertion after chewing qat, a leafy narcotic, and on hearing the Yemeni National Guard offered attractive terms. He was received by a Yemeni officer who had deserted from the FRA two years earlier, and gave up information about all FRA and British dispositions around Ain. Hagaily's commanders hoped his return to the federation would influence his fellow soldiers, enlightening them as to the Yemeni regime's true character.<sup>49</sup> This proved to be somewhat unrealistic. Between 1 May and 31 August 1963, 58 FRA soldiers deserted in total, although the number dropped to 16 between 1 September and 31 December.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: Signal from HQ FRA to Federal Ministry of Defence, 7 January 1964.

<sup>46</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/34: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summaries, 10 March, 17 March, 24 March, 3 May 1964.

<sup>47</sup> Kevin Koehler, Dorothy Ohl, and Holger Albrecht, 'From Disaffection to Desertion: How Networks Facilitate Military Insubordination in Civil Conflict', *Comparative Politics*, 48/4 (2016), 439.

<sup>48</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/2475: Letter from Commander FRA to Acting Deputy High Commissioner, 12 May 1963.

<sup>49</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/2475: '9462 Pte MOHD HUSSAIN HAGAILY 3 FRA'.

<sup>50</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: 'Quarterly Security Report. 1 Sep-31 Dec 63', HQ FRA, 22 February 1964.

Soldiers could register their discontent without having to desert, by refusing to re-enlist in the army when their contracted service term expired. In late 1962 the Yemeni revolution accounted for an increase in soldiers declining to re-engage amongst those from the border areas, possibly because they wanted to be with their families at an unpredictable time (see Table 1).<sup>51</sup> The normal rate for soldiers declining to re-enlist was about 12 or 13 per cent. Brigadier van Lessen, commanding the FRA, believed most soldiers supported the revolution. In January and February Yemeni republican forces contested the border around Wadi Ain, with 2nd and 4th FRA brought into action to defend the Federation. These operations proved successful, but the troops "were not happy at being called upon to fight, and possibly to die, for this border." When five soldiers in 2nd FRA requested permission to resign from the force van Lessen replaced the unit at the front with the 4th battalion.<sup>52</sup> By September 1963 the re-engagement rate had stabilised at the normal level.<sup>53</sup>

Table 1: FRA soldiers declining to re-engage at end of service.<sup>54</sup>

<u>Month</u>	<u>Soldiers declining to re-engage</u>
November 1962	35%
December 1962	26%
January 1963	31%
February 1963	27%
March 1963	8.5%

<sup>51</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>52</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 28 March 1963.

<sup>53</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Quarterly Security Report', HQ FRA, 3 September 1963.

<sup>54</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 28 March 1963; 30 April 1963.

April 1963	15%
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The FRA security reports only monitored Arab personnel. Brigadier Maurice MacWilliam served 10 days as the Force Commander in April 1964 before resigning in protest at an instruction from Middle East Command to mislead the press about forthcoming operations around the Dhala Road. Furthermore, MacWilliam thought the FRA woefully unprepared for the government's planned expansion and handover to Arab officers. Under-manning in the FRA and federal defence ministry headquarters placed a great burden on the British officers. MacWilliam refused "to subject them to further strain", calling for a "massive reinforcement" to "halt a rapid degeneration of the force and the possibility of trouble."<sup>55</sup> The High Commissioner, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, accepted there was some substance to the complaints so asked London to send a team of experts to examine the situation.<sup>56</sup> A respected soldier awarded a Military Cross and three Distinguished Service Orders in the Second World War, MacWilliam found himself reduced in rank to colonel and posted to a series of dead-end jobs.<sup>57</sup> The preliminary report by William Geraghty, the senior civil servant sent out at Trevaskis' request, found no justification for his resignation. FRA officers denied any problems existed (as well they might).<sup>58</sup>

The final category of disloyal behaviour evident in the surviving records is foot-dragging, characterised as "a silent, internal exit from the mission" by soldiers uneasy about the task assigned to them, and can take the form of avoiding combat.<sup>59</sup> The extent of the practice in South Arabia is obscure, as are the social group dynamics which fostered them. During the

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<sup>55</sup> TNA CO 968/785: Telegram from Sir Kennedy Trevaskis to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 May 1964.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CO 968/785: Telegram from Sir Kennedy Trevaskis to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 May 1964.

<sup>57</sup> 'Brigadier Maurice MacWilliam', *The Times*, 10 January 1997.

<sup>58</sup> TNA CO 968/786: Minute from W. Geraghty to Minister of Defence (Army), 21 May 1964.

<sup>59</sup> Yagil Levy, 'Control from within: How soldiers control the military', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23/1 (2017), 197.

Radfan operations in May 1964 British officials complained about federal soldiers failing to destroy crops in inhabited areas designated for collective punishment.<sup>60</sup> The commander of Middle East Land Forces, Major-General John Willoughby, believed "up country only the British units get attacked, ...all the FRA do is get up in the morning, have a shave & then squat in a circle and fire their rifles in the sky." In August 1965 he noted 4th FRA in Dhala tended to remain in their camp at night rather than going out to ambush the enemy, "a very serious but none the less typical situation."<sup>61</sup> The force commander, Brigadier Viner, wrote elusively about a "reluctance to undertake operations as forcefully as should be expected" in "certain battalions."<sup>62</sup>

Many of the disloyal behaviours in the FRA also occurred in the other security forces. The Federal Guard (paramilitary police) unit in Dhala nearly mutinied when British troops accidentally wounded several men in crossfire during an insurgent attack on their base in September 1964. The local British colonial administrator had to withdraw for his own safety.<sup>63</sup> In January 1964 four members of the Quaiti Armed Constabulary attempted to kill the state Military Secretary by stabbing.<sup>64</sup> A Sub-Inspector in the Aden Police deserted to Yemen and wrote "scurrilous articles" denouncing his former employer.<sup>65</sup> In April 1966, 92 officers resigned from the Aden police force.<sup>66</sup> Disloyalty extended to British forces too. Corporal Duncan Irving was charged in the civil court in Aden in January 1965 with killing a civilian whilst off-duty.<sup>67</sup> This case and several others outraged soldiers, who objected to being tried

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<sup>60</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 104.

<sup>61</sup> IWMD: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entries for 23 May, 6 August 1965.

<sup>62</sup> TNA CO 968/806: 'An assessment of the Federal Regular Army', Commander FRA, 27 October 1965.

<sup>63</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/35: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 7 September 1964.

<sup>64</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/34: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 4 February 1964.

<sup>65</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/34: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 13 August 1963.

<sup>66</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/208: Aden Monthly Intelligence Summary, 12 April 1966.

<sup>67</sup> TNA CO 1055/281: Letter from Fred Mulley, Minister of Defence for the Army, to Anthony Greenwood, 19 February 1965.

by Arab jurors or being confined in an Aden jail.<sup>68</sup> When a similar situation arose during the Cyprus Emergency the governor passed an Emergency Regulation requiring the Attorney-General to consent to any prosecutions, effectively removing the armed forces from civil jurisdiction.<sup>69</sup> Calling on the Colonial Secretary to grant service personnel immunity from prosecution in March 1965, Defence Secretary Denis Healey stressed "the effect of these cases on the morale and self-confidence of the Army. I simply cannot afford to run any risk in this field."<sup>70</sup> Facing some resistance from the Colonial Office, Healey warned further prosecutions implied "serious consequences."<sup>71</sup> Middle East Command alerted London to behaviour somewhere between foot-dragging and mutiny:

Morale continues to be affected by the drawn out legal proceedings leading to the trial of Corporal Irving on 03 May. Far more significant is the fact that troops are in an invidious and unfair position which is preventing them from carrying out their internal security duties with the resolution essential for success. ...Many men have told me that they are not prepared to open fire until they are assured of protection against the likelihood of trial by an Arab jury and ten years imprisonment in a local prison. ...continued lack of jurisdiction can only have very serious effect on both efficiency and morale and this will become much worse should Corporal Irving be committed to Crater prison in the same week.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> TNA DEFE 13/468: Telegram from CinC MidEast to Ministry of Defence, 25 March 1965.

<sup>69</sup> David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 206-207.

<sup>70</sup> TNA DEFE 13/468: Minute from Denis Healey to Anthony Greenwood, 25 March 1965.

<sup>71</sup> TNA DEFE 13/468: Letter from Denis Healey to Anthony Greenwood, 15 April 1965.

<sup>72</sup> TNA DEFE 13/468: Telegram from Commander-in-Chief MIDEAST to MOD (Army), 29 April 1965.

Unbeknown to Middle East Command, the Colonial Secretary had caved in to Healey's demands five days earlier.<sup>73</sup> The Privy Council passed an Order in Council on 1 June depriving local courts of jurisdiction for offences committed by British service personnel on duty, against other service members, or against British property.<sup>74</sup> Corporal Irving was found not guilty by the type of jury previously claimed to be implacably hostile to British soldiers.<sup>75</sup> The controversy over civil prosecutions demonstrates that doubts were raised not only about Arab soldiers' willingness to fight for the Federation of South Arabia's survival, but British soldiers too, in the months when ministers deliberated over whether to abandon Aden. Later on, doubts arose at a high command level. In October-November 1966 Major-General Willoughby refused to implement a direct instruction from the Vice-Chief of the General Staff to stop undercover military patrols, after the Special Air Service accidentally shot dead a Royal Anglian sergeant.<sup>76</sup> The operations in Aden were putting a dangerous strain on loyalty within British ranks as well as those of local allies.

### **Accounting for disloyalty**

How did British officers account for the Federal Regular Army's inconsistent loyalty? To begin with, long-existing racialised beliefs about tribal fighting characteristics predominated. After the Yemeni revolution expanded the scope of nationalist politics throughout South Arabia, the emphasis turned towards outside influences corrupting minds easily led astray. At no point did the Federal Regular Army codify a coherent model for explaining loyalty or predicting disintegration. Rather, a range of views existed throughout the force, in some cases extending

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<sup>73</sup> TNA PREM 13/585: Memorandum from Anthony Greenwood to the Prime Minister, 24 April 1965.

<sup>74</sup> TNA DEFE 13/468: Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir Richard Turnbull, 1 June 1965.

<sup>75</sup> TNA CO 1055/281: Telegram from Sir Richard Turnbull to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 5 May 1965.

<sup>76</sup> IWMD: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entries for 29 October, 30 November 1966.

to a self-awareness about just how little British officers understood about the men under their command. The dominant framework for understanding combat motivation in Western armed forces is primary group theory, which emphasises inter-personal relations in small teams.<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to note that British FRA officers simply did not think about their soldiers in these terms. Once the decision to withdraw from Aden had been reached in 1965 the British government prioritised a safe military withdrawal and a handover to reliable allies.<sup>78</sup> This section of the article argues senior officers and policy-makers could not accurately judge the handover's military component because they lacked insight into soldiers' motivation.

As in other colonial militaries, racialised beliefs held by British officers in the Federal Regular Army reflected ideas prevalent in metropolitan society.<sup>79</sup> Spencer Mawby notes the widespread tropes at this time of Arab passivity, political naivety, and amoral guile.<sup>80</sup> The Aden Protectorate Levies drew heavily on the Indian Army's martial races tradition, where certain peoples were believed to possess special fighting abilities.<sup>81</sup> APL officers upheld a firm distinction between sophisticated urban Adenis (hardly recruited at all) and "up-country" men who appeared to have a natural liking for soldiering. The FRA's semi-official history depicted the Aulaqi tribe as particularly good recruits due to their "warlike, smart and intelligent" characteristics.<sup>82</sup> James Lunt, who commanded the FRA from 1961 to 1964, described how the Aulaqis "...although exceptionally turbulent and factious, are unusually intelligent."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Tarak Barkawi, 'Subaltern Soldiers: Eurocentrism and the Nation-State in the Combat Motivation Debates', in Anthony King (ed.), *Frontline: Combat and Cohesion in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25.

<sup>78</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 176.

<sup>79</sup> Adam Dighton, 'Race, Masculinity and Imperialism: The British Officer and the Egyptian Army (1882-1899),' *War and Society*, 35/1 (2016), 5, 17.

<sup>80</sup> Spencer Mawby, 'Orientalism and the Failure of British Policy in the Middle East: The Case of Aden', *History* 95/319 (2010), 340.

<sup>81</sup> Gavin Rand and Kim A. Wagner, 'Recruiting the "martial races": identities and military service in colonial India,' *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46/3-4 (2012), 232-254.

<sup>82</sup> Edwards, *The Gaysh*, 7, 12, 47.

<sup>83</sup> James Lunt, *The Barren Rocks of Aden* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1966), 157.

Whereas the Indian Army maintained ethnically homogenous companies within battalions, the APL abandoned the practice in 1952, as did the federal army.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the overall tribal composition was assiduously monitored. For example, on 1 December 1961 the main groups represented in the force were 32.37% Audhali, 20.56% Dathina, 19.71% Aulaqi, 8.67% Yafai and 4.85% Wahidi.<sup>85</sup>

When it came to motivation and loyalty, a security report on the APL in 1959 claimed "The Levy soldier is a mercenary in the full sense of the word and his concept of loyalty, integrity and dependability cannot be judged by our standards." Captain Boxhall, the report's author, charged the population in south Arabia with being far less politically minded than the rest of the Arab world.<sup>86</sup> Others disagreed. David Ledger was attached to the APL, the Trucial Oman Scouts and the Muscat Army from 1960 to 1963. He perceived "a division of thinking between the European mind and the Arabian mind. ...The Arabian put all thought of joining the army and going to war right at the bottom of the list. He joined the army for a living."<sup>87</sup> These ideas carried over into the FRA. Brigadier van Lessen thought the ordinary soldier "extremely parochial" and thus hardly aware of the new federation's existence. He also ascribed material rewards to be the primary motivator for service.<sup>88</sup> George Coles commanded the training battalion between 1963 and 1965. His recollections convey mixed emotions towards the soldiers, at once respecting them as "very tough and quite keen to learn", yet "difficult. ..they weren't very intelligent."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Edwards, *The Gaysh*, 75; Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Army Half Yearly Security Report', 11 January 1962.

<sup>86</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Letter from Captain P.G. Boxhall, APL, to Colonel J.H.S. Bowring, War Office, 29 June 1959, enclosing report 'Security of Aden Protectorate Levies'.

<sup>87</sup> IWMSA: David Ledger, catalogue number 10207, reel 1.

<sup>88</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>89</sup> IWMSA: George Henry Hugh Coles, catalogue number 10126, reel 3.

British attitudes towards Arab officers portrayed them as more politically threatening than the rank and file. Education apparently made officers susceptible to hostile propaganda, though an imagined innate impetuosity also justified the need for continuing British guidance.<sup>90</sup> Already in December 1962 - when only a year old - the officers appeared to be "somewhat divided in their loyalty to the Federation".<sup>91</sup> Within four months a senior officer was known to be active in a nationalist political organisation, and the impending handover of control to the federal government was feared to portend a descent into nepotism based on tribal connections.<sup>92</sup> The army's intelligence officer, Major Wagstaff, bifurcated the officers into the poorly-educated, conservative, older generation, and the better educated younger men swept up by the political changes in the Middle East. Wagstaff recommended a judicious flow of promotions and retirements to dampen any inter-generational tensions. Even this analysis, in some senses more nuanced than tribe-based assertions, rested on racist assumptions:

It is worth noting that much of the Western civilization which has been absorbed by the younger men is genuinely admired, as are western ideas of justice, rule of law and freedom from Nepotism. Nevertheless, the fact of centuries of feudal rule exerts a very strong pull on some men, and in a crisis the veneer of a still relatively unfamiliar civilization could easily be stripped off, disclosing the old but familiar medieval way of life beneath.<sup>93</sup>

The fog of ignorance clouding British assessments about FRA loyalty gave space to vapid truisms. Colonel H.B.H. Waring, who served on secondment for a year, observed of his men:

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<sup>90</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 8 March 1960.

<sup>91</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>92</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report. Period 1 Feb 63-30 Apr 63'.

<sup>93</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: 'Quarterly Security Report. 1 Sep-31 Dec 63'.

"...they take setbacks stoically on the surface but badly underneath."<sup>94</sup> George Coles sensed resentment about something in those he trained, "...one never knew quite what", aside from a vague anti-British feeling.<sup>95</sup> The difficulty in understanding what soldiers thought was exacerbated by poor language skills. In June 1959 only six British officers, out of 87, had received training at the Foreign Office's Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies in Beirut. Three of them could speak the local dialect fluently. Another 23 had basic conversational Arabic.<sup>96</sup> Shortly after the Yemeni revolution the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, warned British officers' short attachments and limited Arabic could hinder efforts to prevent desertions.<sup>97</sup>

The revolution also changed official attitudes towards hostile propaganda. Beforehand, foreign broadcasts were viewed as harmless. An assessment in 1959 deemed soldiers to be "not seriously affected by anti-colonial or nationalist propaganda".<sup>98</sup> British officers believed soldiers listened to Egyptian radio stations for the entertainment programmes, and judged the political content to be beyond their comprehension.<sup>99</sup> Colonial officials and military officers set greater store by propaganda as a reason for Britain's travails in south Arabia as the security situation deteriorated, distracting them from the federation's unpopularity and denying local people possessed any agency in how they consumed information.<sup>100</sup> Within a few months of the revolution, complacency turned to alarm, as Brigadier van Lessen claimed "The people of South Arabia have been subjected to indoctrination for more years than were the Germans to

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<sup>94</sup> IWMD: Papers of H.B.H. Waring, catalogue number 09/53/1: Notebook on service in Federal Regular Army, entry for 9 August 1966.

<sup>95</sup> IWMSA: George Henry Hugh Coles, catalogue number 10126, reel 3.

<sup>96</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Letter from Captain P.G. Boxhall, APL, to Colonel J.H.S. Bowring, War Office, 29 June 1959, enclosing report 'Security of Aden Protectorate Levies'.

<sup>97</sup> TNA DEFE 28/169: Signal from HQ MIDEAST to Ministry of Defence, 17 October 1962.

<sup>98</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Letter from Captain P.G. Boxhall, APL, to Colonel J.H.S. Bowring, War Office, 29 June 1959, enclosing report 'Security of Aden Protectorate Levies'.

<sup>99</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 8 March 1960.

<sup>100</sup> Spencer Mawby, 'The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism: Information Policy and Propaganda in South Arabia at the End of Empire', in Greg Kennedy and Christopher Tuck (eds.), *British Propaganda and Wars of Empire: Influencing Friend and Foe 1900-2010* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 171.

Nazi propaganda". Radio Sana'a's calls for volunteers to join the republican cause represented a convenient explanation for the spate of desertions in October and November 1962, as an alternative to uncomfortable questions about how the FRA was being run.<sup>101</sup>

Written propaganda directed at FRA soldiers appeared from March 1963. Leaflets calling on soldiers to throw off their British oppressors were found in 1st and 2nd Battalions.<sup>102</sup> Some leaflets penned by FRA deserters called on their comrades to join them in the Yemen, and were distributed in garrison towns as well as in camp.<sup>103</sup> Broadcasts, however, posed a greater threat because most soldiers could not read. From February 1963 Radio Sana'a started encouraging federal soldiers and police officers to kill British personnel.<sup>104</sup> A broadcast from Cairo in September 1963 made the following appeal:

Brother soldiers, you should not regard it as your mission to kill your brothers in the South or to provoke your brothers in the north. But on your shoulders rest heavy responsibilities towards the Arab struggle such as the liberation of stricken Palestine. Help the free men in their task. Learn from your brother soldiers in Algeria and from their refusal to co-operate with the forces of imperialist France. Act like the proud soldiers of Algeria. Britain and the agents cannot take revenge on you because they are timid and unable to do so.<sup>105</sup>

Whatever the effect on the rank and file, these messages rattled the British officers. Brigadier van Lessen now doubted whether any operations could be undertaken in the teeth of Yemeni

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<sup>101</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>102</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/37: 'Joint Intelligence Committee Middle East. Weekly Intelligence Review', 8 March 1963.

<sup>103</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: 'Quarterly Security Report. 1 Sep-31 Dec 63', HQ FRA, 22 February 1964.

<sup>104</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report. Period 1 Feb 63-30 Apr 63'.

<sup>105</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/38: 'Joint Intelligence Committee Middle East. Weekly Intelligence Review', 27 September 1963.

and Egyptian propaganda.<sup>106</sup> During the Radfan campaign in 1964 broadcasts vilified specific Arab FRA commanders.<sup>107</sup> Robert Hywel-Jones, a British officer on secondment from 1964 to 1966, worked closely alongside Arab officers in an operations room. One officer said he needed to be known by his colleagues to listen to Radio Cairo. Hywel-Jones wanted to believe Arab officers distrusted the Egyptians as outsiders pursuing their own agenda.<sup>108</sup> Intelligence assessments expected hostile radio propaganda to effect soldiers' loyalty without knowing how or why. Evidence detailed enough to establish a clear correlation between propaganda and combat motivation, present in studies on the German military in the Second World War, for example, is missing.<sup>109</sup> Whilst a surge in propaganda after September 1962 appeared to radically alter Britain's fortunes, ignorance about federal allies' loyalty continued to bedevil strategy-making right up until the final departure in November 1967. Colonel Chaplin at the federal defence ministry argued ten percent of soldiers actively opposed the government, 20 to 30 percent seemed loyal, and the majority sat on the fence.<sup>110</sup> Yet at the same time Brigadier Viner acknowledged the shaky foundations on which all assessments rested:

The extent, at present, to which the FRA has been penetrated admits a very wide variety of opinion, based on few facts and a great deal of conjecture. There are traces held on some thirty officers and forty other ranks. About a quarter of the traces indicate disloyalty exclusively but the evidence is often so loosely worded that the degree of disloyalty is negligible. ...One cannot exclude the probability that some men have turned traitor.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 28 March 1963.

<sup>107</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/35: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 21 June 1964.

<sup>108</sup> IWMSA: Robert Ian Hywel-Jones, catalogue number 10096, reel 2.

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin Barber and Charles Miller, 'Propaganda and Combat Motivation: Radio Broadcasts and German Soldiers' Performance in World War II', *World Politics*, 71/3 (2019), 457-502.

<sup>110</sup> TNA CO 968/806: Letter from Colonel J.E. Chaplin, Federal Ministry of Defence, to Lt-Gen. Sir Charles Harington, MEC, 28 October 1965.

<sup>111</sup> TNA CO 968/806: 'An assessment of the Federal Regular Army', Commander FRA, 27 October 1965.

The FRA's essential unreliability filtered up to the national defence policy-making level. Denis Healey visited south Arabia as Opposition defence spokesman in May-June 1964, noting the popular animosity to the federation in Aden, and the difficulty in imposing military control in the countryside.<sup>112</sup> Observing operations in the Radfan, Healey privately described the FRA's involvement earlier in the year as "half-hearted & ineffective", and recorded the surge in desertions after the Yemeni revolution, but regarded a senior officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed, to be "v. good".<sup>113</sup> Once in office Healey encountered the FRA's then commander, the upbeat Brigadier Lunt, several times in London. In January 1965 Lunt informed him the younger officers in the FRA were becoming anti-Egyptian in outlook.<sup>114</sup> On balance, Healey seems to have been immune to wishful thinking about the FRA's loyalty. Writing to support a Colonial Office bid for higher spending on the federal security forces, he cautioned:

There are already clear signs of overstrain. Unless immediate action is taken to improve their organisation, equipment and pay it is not merely a danger but a virtual certainty that their numbers, efficiency and morale will rapidly decline. That process, once started, will be hard to check, and before long impossible to reverse. There would then be no alternative but for British forces to shoulder the entire burden of defence and internal security. I cannot say exactly how many troops would be required for the purpose, but there is no doubt that, with internal hostility inevitably growing (simply because our troops are not Arabs) and adding to the effect of externally-directed subversion, the numbers would run into many thousands. Even if we could readily

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<sup>112</sup> Healey, *The Time of My Life*, 231.

<sup>113</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford: Papers of Denis Healey, MS.Healey 62: File 18. Diary of a visit to Asia, 1964. Entry for 'Asia. 26 May-14 June 1964'.

<sup>114</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford: Papers of Denis Healey, MS.Healey 63: Diaries 1964-1969. Book 30. Entries for 26 October 1964 and 29 January 1965.

make these numbers available - which we can not - the cost of maintaining them in the Federation would far exceed the cost of the proposals which have been put forward for improving the organisation and pay of the local forces.<sup>115</sup>

In late March 1965 the Vice-Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Baker, went to Aden to investigate for the Chiefs of Staff. He had learned to read insurgency conflicts as the director of operations during the Cyprus Emergency.<sup>116</sup> Given the deteriorating security situation, Baker was astonished Britain had so many friends left in the federation. Only a large increase in resources for the federation, assuming control over the Federal Regular Army (effectively abolishing the defence ministry), creating a federal intelligence organisation and imposing direct rule over Aden town stood a chance of arresting the slide into chaos. Baker pointed out "Time is NOT on our side."<sup>117</sup> By this point the British Army needed to devote almost as many units to shoring up the FRA in the countryside as to internal security tasks in Aden.<sup>118</sup> As William James argues, the Cabinet made the decision to withdraw from Aden by 1968 in June 1965.<sup>119</sup> The Chancellor of the Exchequer opened these discussions, underscoring the anxieties about defence expenditure. One of the reasons why Aden was so expensive was because the subvention to the locally-recruited security forces kept going up to keep them loyal - in addition to the expenditure on British military operations. Ministers concluded "Our position at Aden was precarious ...we should plan on the assumption that it could not be held."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> TNA DEFE 25/115: Minute from Denis Healey to Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 18 December 1964.

<sup>116</sup> R.H. Whitworth, 'Baker, Sir Geoffrey Harding', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. Accessed online on 30 July 2023 at: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30784>

<sup>117</sup> TNA DEFE 25/116: 'Report on visit to Aden 22-26 Mar 65', from VCGS to CGS, 29 March 1965.

<sup>118</sup> TNA DEFE 25/191: Chiefs of Staff Committee, briefing note by Group Captain D.A. Trotman, 22 March 1965.

<sup>119</sup> James, 'Global Britain's strategic problem East of Suez', 176.

<sup>120</sup> TNA CAB 130/213: 'Cabinet. Defence Policy. Minutes of a Meeting held at Chequers', 13 June 1965.

In September, disturbing reports from General Harington at Middle East Command prompted the Chiefs of Staff to demand action.<sup>121</sup> Field Marshal Hull, the Chief of the Defence Staff, informed Denis Healey "the maintenance of morale in the Federal forces gives fresh cause for disquiet". The Federal Regular Army contained National Liberation Front sympathisers and there were tensions between the senior Arab officer and the British commander. Hull wanted Aden's constitution to be suspended, so the High Commissioner could assume direct control, in order to stabilise the federal forces and publicly commit to withdrawal "in an orderly fashion."<sup>122</sup> Healey secured the Prime Minister's agreement to these measures, which prevented an immediate crisis but scuppered all hopes of reaching a compromise with moderate nationalist politicians on the nature and speed of the disengagement.<sup>123</sup> During his visit to Aden when in Opposition Healey recognised the FRA "will be new power factor."<sup>124</sup> Grasping the position in similar terms, Major-General Willoughby at Middle East Land Forces noted "If people are not careful the FRA will one day seize power."<sup>125</sup> The only alternative to reforming the army was disbandment. As a senior official told ministers in May 1964, in such an eventuality soldiers "would feel aggrieved and many of them would become dissidents."<sup>126</sup> Before reaching the decision to leave Aden forever, British strategy required the federal security forces to compensate for manpower shortages. After the decision came in mid-1965 the primary objective was to prevent the federal security forces jeopardising an orderly exit by mounting a coup or mutiny. The British officers charged with this mission nearly succeeded.

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<sup>121</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford: Papers of Denis Healey, MS.Healey 63: Diaries 1964-1969. Book 32. Entry for 21 September 1965.

<sup>122</sup> TNA DEFE 25/192: Minute from Chief of the Defence Staff to Secretary of State for Defence, [no day] September 1965.

<sup>123</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 132.

<sup>124</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford: Papers of Denis Healey, MS.Healey 62: File 18. Diary of a visit to Asia, 1964. Entry for 'Asia. 26 May-14 June 1964'.

<sup>125</sup> IWMD: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entry for 10 June 1965.

<sup>126</sup> TNA CO 968/786: Minute from W. Geraghty, to Minister of Defence (Army), 21 May 1964.

## Preventing disintegration

Military disintegration is "a condition of organizational paralysis characterized by the total and often sudden collapse of the willingness of the average soldier to resist or to attack the enemy."<sup>127</sup> Certain causes, such as extended exposure to danger, poor leadership and physical exhaustion, arise in every conflict.<sup>128</sup> Colonial armies employed various methods to uphold loyalty and prevent disintegration. The authorities often monitored morale by censoring soldiers' mail, or placing informers within the ranks.<sup>129</sup> The Indian Army in the Second World War made welfare payments to military families in need.<sup>130</sup> In 1958 the Federal Army in the Central African Federation rolled out sports programmes to divert soldiers from undesirable political activities.<sup>131</sup> During the war in Indochina the French authorities built cultural centres specially for off-duty west African soldiers.<sup>132</sup> And in Algeria the Fifth Bureau exercised responsibility for psychological warfare output directed not only at the enemy and the local population, but to bolster military morale too.<sup>133</sup> The Federal Regular Army was typical, then, in operating several techniques to keep soldiers loyal, which may be categorised in relation to resources, discipline, protective security, training and propaganda. None of these measures in themselves demonstrated outstanding effectiveness; in combination they held the FRA together well enough to prevent a mutiny until June 1967.

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<sup>127</sup> Stephen D. Wesbrook, 'The Potential for Military Disintegration', in Sam C. Sarkesian (ed.), *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military* (London: Sage, 1980), 244.

<sup>128</sup> Kaushik Roy, 'Discipline and Morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 44/6 (2010), 1280.

<sup>129</sup> Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire*, 77; Tim Stapleton, "'Bad Boys': Infiltration and Sedition in the African Military Units of the Central African Federation (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) 1953-63,' *Journal of Military History*, 73/4 (2009), 1180.

<sup>130</sup> Kaushik Roy, 'Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II', *Journal of Military History*, 73/2 (2009), 519.

<sup>131</sup> Stapleton, "'Bad Boys': Infiltration and Sedition in the African Military Units of the Central African Federation', 1177.

<sup>132</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2006), 161.

<sup>133</sup> Ruth Ginio, *The French Army and its African soldiers: the years of decolonization* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 112.

Holding the army together depended first of all on money. The military leadership in Aden couched additional expenditure requests in terms of the necessity to prevent disintegration. In September 1964 the Treasury granted the federal forces a seven per cent pay rise to bolster their morale.<sup>134</sup> By January London accepted morale must be fragile enough to warrant a further 25 per cent, backdated to April.<sup>135</sup> During 1964 the insurgents began to receive training and weaponry from Egypt, including bazookas, automatic rifles, mortars, and grenades.<sup>136</sup> Appeals for improved weapons for federal troops also invoked concerns over morale.<sup>137</sup> When asking for light aircraft, armoured cars, heavy mortars and extra units, federal defence minister Sultan Fadhle bin Ali al-Abdali pointed out a new FRA battalion cost only one-fifth what a British battalion cost.<sup>138</sup> Denis Healey accepted such logic, arguing in Cabinet a year later that the FRA's "loyalty could only be relied upon so long as they were assured of their pay and of their future."<sup>139</sup> On this occasion the Prime Minister over-ruled the Chancellor's objections to increase the capital grant to the federal forces by £5.5 million plus another £2.5 million in recurrent expenditure annually.<sup>140</sup> By April 1967 the government had decided to pay £10.25 million annually for three years after independence, and for an artillery battery, an engineer unit, an armoured car squadron, and a small air force before then.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> TNA CO 968/780: 'Extract from Annex to Minute 1 of Part I to COS 52nd Meeting/64', 1 September 1964.

<sup>135</sup> TNA DEFE 25/115: Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies to Acting High Commissioner, Aden, 1 January 1965.

<sup>136</sup> TNA CO 968/789: 'Notes on plans for re-armament and expansion of the Federal Forces', Federal Joint Operations Centre, 6 February 1965.

<sup>137</sup> TNA DEFE 28/147: Letter from Lt-Col. R.S. Richmond, MEC, to Col. H.N.H. Wild, Ministry of Defence, 16 May 1965.

<sup>138</sup> TNA CO 968/789: 'Meeting between Secretary of State for Defence and Federal Ministers of Defence and Internal Security', 17 June 1965.

<sup>139</sup> TNA CAB 128/41/26: 'Cabinet. Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet', 26 May 1966.

<sup>140</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates*, 154.

<sup>141</sup> TNA DEFE 28/161: Minute from Major P.H. Bartlett, Federal Ministry of Defence, to Ministry of Defence, 19 April 1967, with attached 'Notes on the Federal Regular Army (April 1967 Revise)'.

Court martials and more informal disciplinary processes deterred would-be waverers from deserting or foot-dragging.<sup>142</sup> Only fragmentary references survive in the archives. Trade union membership was widespread amongst the non-combatant enlistments; 147 were dismissed for striking in February 1960.<sup>143</sup> In September 1962 the army discharged a private soldier who returned from an unauthorised absence.<sup>144</sup> In June 1963 two soldiers were arrested for participating in a People's Socialist Party demonstration in Aden.<sup>145</sup> The force discharged "Several soldiers" in October 1965 for having contact with the National Liberation Front.<sup>146</sup> The Aden Protectorate Levies had operated a system whereby tribal leaders sponsored each new recruit and were held accountable if they deserted.<sup>147</sup> An ordinance enacted by the Supreme Council of the Federation in November 1962 empowered the State from which a soldier came to fine his family 10,000 shillings, until the deserter handed himself in to the authorities. If he failed to do so the State could retain the fine, confiscate property to the equivalent value, or imprison a relative until the fine was paid. After surrendering to the authorities the deserter remained liable to criminal prosecution.<sup>148</sup>

Basic protective security procedures in the Aden Protectorate Levies underwent some upgrading under the federal government. In 1959 British officers expected subversion to be detectable by Arab officers listening in to the "predilection for endless evening chatter", a system dependent upon the Arab officers being loyal.<sup>149</sup> In early 1962 the FRA applied vetting procedures to Arab personnel with access to classified information and started a blacklist for

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<sup>142</sup> Johnson, *True to Their Salt*, 95-123.

<sup>143</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half yearly security report', 18 October 1960.

<sup>144</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/2475: Letter from Commander FRA to Minister of Defence, 22 October 1962.

<sup>145</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/34: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 4 June 1963.

<sup>146</sup> TNA CO 968/806: 'An assessment of the Federal Regular Army', Commander FRA, 27 October 1965.

<sup>147</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half yearly security report', 1 June 1960.

<sup>148</sup> TNA IOR/R/20/B/2475: 'Extract from Minutes of Meeting no. 29 of the Supreme Council', 1 November 1962.

<sup>149</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Letter from Captain P.G. Boxhall, APL, to Colonel J.H.S. Bowring, War Office, 29 June 1959, enclosing report 'Security of Aden Protectorate Levies'.

"undesirable" potential recruits.<sup>150</sup> The British Army's counter-intelligence unit in the Middle East provided some assistance in vetting. The exact nature of its activities is unclear.<sup>151</sup> As an additional safeguard, the commander requested the federal defence ministry to limit the amount of classified material sent to the force.<sup>152</sup> Within the ministry, British officers kept the most secret documents away from the minister's secretary, who fell under suspicion.<sup>153</sup> Attempts to create a federal Special Branch, another potential route to detecting subversion, never got off the ground.<sup>154</sup> Whether the Special Branch in Aden conducted investigations for the FRA cannot be verified. It did examine the "security of native labour", but this may not have extended to soldiers.<sup>155</sup> Consequently the FRA possessed "no adequate nor systematic means for detecting disloyal influences" beyond "General alertness among British officers."<sup>156</sup>

Between 1947 and 1965 the British oversaw the transition of 16 armies from colonial control to independence.<sup>157</sup> Officer cadets underwent training at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst to address the British Army's global manpower problems and as a means to preserve British influence after colonies attained independence.<sup>158</sup> "Arabisation" in the Aden Protectorate Levies began in 1959, giving greater responsibility to Arab officers whilst improving training for soldiers and non-commissioned officers. Brigadier Lunt assumed command of the FRA in December 1961, determined to learn from his time in Jordan's Arab Legion, where his superior's reluctance to grant Arab officers any meaningful responsibility

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<sup>150</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Half Yearly Security Report', 1 June 1962.

<sup>151</sup> TNA WO 32/18981: Minute from Colonel J.B. Howard, Directorate of Military Intelligence, to MI 1(a), 25 October 1963.

<sup>152</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Minute from MEC to Under Secretary of State, War Office, 20 July 1962.

<sup>153</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>154</sup> TNA CO 968/806: 'An assessment of the Federal Regular Army', Commander FRA, 27 October 1965. On the intelligence machinery, see: Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies: British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2013), 105-155.

<sup>155</sup> IWMSA: Bryan Emery, catalogue number 29530, reel 7.

<sup>156</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: 'Quarterly Security Report. 1 Sep-31 Dec 63', HQ FRA, 22 February 1964.

<sup>157</sup> J.D. Lunt, 'The evolution of an army – I,' *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, 110 (1965), 158.

<sup>158</sup> Kristine Eck and Chiara Ruffa, 'Military Training and Decolonisation in the British Empire', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 51/1 (2023), 156-181.

caused discontent.<sup>159</sup> Far from being a purely altruistic exercise, British officers expected Arabisation to "result in a more intelligent cadre of Arab officers through which enemy attempts at subversion and propaganda could be more readily detected."<sup>160</sup> Another expected benefit was, as Middle East Command appreciated, to reduce the call on British personnel.<sup>161</sup>

Arabisation involved new training courses in "General Education", tactics, administration, weapons-handling, motor transport, and for officer cadets.<sup>162</sup> A delicate meeting in February 1961 agreed to merge the British and Arab officers' messes, upholding the "normal standard to be expected" in a British mess by subsidising the Arab officers' expenses, whilst offering a menu acceptable to all.<sup>163</sup> By this time selected Arab officers attended a course to prepare them for commanding companies, and temporarily ran companies when British officers went on leave.<sup>164</sup> 14 officers passed the course, going on to command all rifle companies and occupy battalion second-in-command posts.<sup>165</sup> Cadets attended training facilities in Britain, such as Mons Officer Cadet School in Aldershot. Instructors commended cadet Ali Mohammed Yafai from Aden: "...a simple man who has got a commission through hard work." His lack of political opinions endeared him to the staff.<sup>166</sup> In July 1963 commanding officers designate were announced with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel to prepare to take over battalions from

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<sup>159</sup> J.D. Lunt, 'The evolution of an army – II,' *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution*, 110 (1965), 226. See also: Graham Jevon, *Glubb Pasha and the Arab Legion: Britain, Jordan, and the End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>160</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Letter from Captain P.G. Boxhall, APL, to Colonel J.H.S. Bowring, War Office, 29 June 1959, enclosing report 'Security of Aden Protectorate Levies'.

<sup>161</sup> TNA DEFE 25/115: 'Federal Regular Army of South Arabia. Provision of Senior British Officers during Final Phases of Arabisation', paper by Lt-Gen. Sir Charles Harington, 5 November 1963.

<sup>162</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 8 March 1960.

<sup>163</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3055: 'Integration of Brit [sic] and Arab Offrs' [sic] Messes. Aden Protectorate Levies', 10 February 1961.

<sup>164</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 18 October 1960; Signal from HQ British Forces Arabian Peninsula to Under Secretary of State, War Office, 14 February 1961, enclosing 'Half yearly security report'.

<sup>165</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: Signal from MEC to War Office, 31 July 1961, attaching 'Aden Protectorate Levies Half Yearly Security Report'; Edwards, *The Gaysh*, 147.

<sup>166</sup> TNA CO 968/782: Minute from P.L. Russell, for Director of Military Intelligence, to J.B.A. Armitage-Smith, Colonial Office, 2 January 1963, with Annexure A.

British officers.<sup>167</sup> These steps appeared to satisfy demand in the FRA for greater responsibility to be transferred to locally-recruited men.<sup>168</sup>

Brigadier Lunt harboured doubts. Moving too fast might result in "a half-baked system". Lunt questioned whether Arab officers should be trusted with administrative responsibilities.<sup>169</sup> The FRA's intelligence staff officer, Major Wagstaff, also clung on to British irreplaceability, arguing Arab officers had been loyal primarily to the British who "fed, equipped, trained, administered, and above all, paid him well and regularly." The federal government engendered no such trust. Unlike FNG officers, who tended to come from the ruling families, FRA officers suspected the federal authorities might weaken their terms of service or sack them for tribal political reasons.<sup>170</sup> Even as the federal government assumed greater responsibility for security, the British government retained formal control over external affairs and defence. Federal ministers were not even informed when the army received new orders.<sup>171</sup>

In March 1960 military authorities set up their own information services to foster "a mental attitude hostile to subversive propaganda."<sup>172</sup> An Arab Relations Section was created to distribute approved newspapers and government publications.<sup>173</sup> Alarmed by the broadcasts coming from the Yemen after the revolution, Middle East Command seconded a public relations officer, who initiated a programme on the Aden Broadcasting Service specially for

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<sup>167</sup> Edwards, *The Gaysh*, 157.

<sup>168</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 28 March 1963.

<sup>169</sup> TNA CO 968/782: Letter from Brigadier J.D. Lunt, HQ FRA, to Lt-Col. W.M.L. Adler, Colonial Office, 17 October 1963.

<sup>170</sup> TNA WO 305/1790: 'The Relationship of the Federal Regular Army with the Federal Government', E.M.W. Wagstaff, GSO 2 (Int), HQ FRA, 16 December 1963.

<sup>171</sup> TNA CO 968/786: 'Report on the Ministry and Force Headquarters organizations of the security forces of the Federation of South Arabia', June 1964.

<sup>172</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 8 March 1960.

<sup>173</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Half-Yearly Report on Security of Aden Protectorate Levies', 18 October 1960.

the FRA.<sup>174</sup> Middle East Command thought the output "very successful".<sup>175</sup> The FRA leadership were more sceptical, noting broadcasts from Aden could not often be received up-country where the army operated, and in any case "cannot be considered a serious counter measure to offset the present flood of hostile propaganda."<sup>176</sup> When it came to publications, the federal newspaper, *Saut al Gunub*, drew few readers amongst the soldiers - not least because the government demanded a year's subscription to be paid in advance.<sup>177</sup> An attempt to obtain reading material from the British Council produced a magazine featuring articles on West African sculpture, deemed "too pseudo cultural for local taste."<sup>178</sup>

Faced with a local incapacity to ramp up counter-propaganda, the Chiefs of Staff brought in the psychological warfare experts from the Directorate of Forward Plans.<sup>179</sup> Major R.J. Shackleton, the Directorate's embedded staff officer at Middle East Command, lacked a subtle grasp of the target audiences, labelling Arabs "more cunning than a cartload of monkeys." His remit extended beyond propaganda for the armed forces to influencing civilian attitudes in South Arabia towards the military.<sup>180</sup> There were open days at air bases, luncheon parties on warships, and youth projects. These "Flavia" operations, conducted at other foreign bases like Singapore too, appeared particularly difficult in Aden, at least according to the British Army's Director-General of Military Training. Lieutenant-General Richardson believed "An Arab doesn't understand gratitude; ...whatever we do is viewed with suspicion by an Arab until he

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<sup>174</sup> TNA DEFE 28/169: Letter from Colonel H.N.H. Wild, Ministry of Defence, to L.C. Glass, Foreign Office, 12 December 1962.

<sup>175</sup> TNA DEFE 28/169: Signal from HQ MIDEAST to Ministry of Defence, 24 January 1963.

<sup>176</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/B/3057: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 15 December 1962.

<sup>177</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report', 28 March 1963.

<sup>178</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Federal Regular Army Quarterly Security Report. Period 1 Feb 63-30 Apr 63'.

<sup>179</sup> TNA DEFE 28/169: 'Psychological operations in the Middle East. Report by the Deputy Director of Forward Plans', Col. H.N.H. Wild, 10 May 1962; on the directorate's earlier operations, see: Huw Bennett, "'Words are cheaper than bullets": Britain's psychological warfare in the Middle East, 1945-1960', *Intelligence and National Security*, 34/7 (2019), 925-944.

<sup>180</sup> TNA DEFE 28/168: Letter from Major R.J. Shackleton, MEC, to Col. H.N.H. Wild, Ministry of Defence, 1 August 1962.

sees in it some personal benefit."<sup>181</sup> After the Yemeni revolution Middle East Command called for Shackleton to be reinforced, as "any lessening of the reliability of the Federal Forces must involve the deployment of British troops".<sup>182</sup> The Treasury only agreed to pay for a full-time public relations officer for the FRA a year later.<sup>183</sup> A monthly newspaper for the federal forces, *Al Gambia (The Dagger)*, began production in May 1963. By the following April it had achieved the second highest circulation for an Arabic language newspaper in the federation.<sup>184</sup> The federal military information team also put out a weekly newsheet, daily news signals, press releases, leaflets and content for eight half-hour radio programmes per week.<sup>185</sup>

Despite the regular complaints from Aden about insufficient resources to counter the tidal wave of Egyptian and Yemeni propaganda washing over the federation, there were deeper problems. As Spencer Mawby argues in regard to the parallel operations run by the Foreign Office's Information Research Department, "There was an intrinsic implausibility to a strategy which urged the local population to resist the influence of a rising, regional Arab power while collaborating with a distant and declining European state."<sup>186</sup> Effective propaganda in counter-insurgencies employed persuasive voices who resonated with the audience. In Malaya in the 1950s this meant former insurgents who had surrendered speaking about the humane treatment they received in captivity.<sup>187</sup> Once Yemeni broadcasts began to target specific Arab FRA officers, the authorities struggled to recruit personnel willing to be recorded condemning

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<sup>181</sup> TNA DEFE 28/153: 'Report by Lieut.-General Sir Charles Richardson on discussions with C-in-C Middle East and GOC East Africa Command on counter-subversion in February, 1963', 8 March 1963.

<sup>182</sup> TNA DEFE 28/169: Signal from H.Q. MIDEAST ADEN to Ministry of Defence, 12 October 1962.

<sup>183</sup> TNA DEFE 28/166: Letter from D.W. Smart, HM Treasury, to Lt.-Col. W.M.L. Adler, Colonial Office, 18 October 1963.

<sup>184</sup> TNA WO 32/18518: 'Quarterly Security Report. 1 May-31 Aug 63', HQ FRA, 3 September 1963; 'Annex A to 424/19/JSI Dated 24 Apr 64. Notes on reception of The Gambia'.

<sup>185</sup> TNA DEFE 28/166: Letter from Major P.H. Bartlett, Federal Ministry of Defence, to Lieutenant Commander F.P. Mathieson, Ministry of Defence, 20 May 1965.

<sup>186</sup> Mawby, 'The British Brand of Anti-Imperialism', 189.

<sup>187</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds, 1948-1958* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Yemen directly.<sup>188</sup> Major Bartlett, the public relations officer, did not have time to get into the field to be "fully conversant with what the Arab Officers and soldiers are thinking and talking about."<sup>189</sup> This raises the question of how persuasive the content he managed could have been. His superior at Middle East Command, Lieutenant Colonel Richmond, only rated British propaganda as "all right in a quiet way."<sup>190</sup> By December 1966 even the Directorate of Forward Plans, usually optimistic about their specialist field, accepted propaganda was "only likely to have a limited effect in the remaining time available."<sup>191</sup>

What Major Bartlett and other British officers who served alongside the FRA did fully understand, however, was that the merger of the army and the Federal National Guard was deeply unpopular. The merger was finally forced through as a tidying-up exercise by London in June 1967, against local advice. The two forces had long been rivals. Nasser Buraik's appointment as the new South Arabian Army's most senior Arab officer caused resentment both because he came from the FRA, and because it seemed to symbolise the domination of the Aulaqi tribe and the central federation, at the expense of the separate federal rulers. Unfortunately this extremely sensitive change was pushed through when the British commander was out of the country on leave.<sup>192</sup> Though we may certainly question the extent to which the British truly grasped tribal politics in the army prior to the merger, there is no doubt that the reorganisation into the South Arabian Army made such understanding as did exist yet more superficial. If the new Army's "cohesion was a vital component of Britain's

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<sup>188</sup> BL, IOR/R/20/D/35: Aden Weekly Intelligence Summary, 29 June 1964.

<sup>189</sup> TNA DEFE 28/166: Letter from Major P.H. Bartlett, Federal Ministry of Defence, to Lieutenant Commander F.P. Mathieson, Ministry of Defence, 20 May 1965.

<sup>190</sup> TNA DEFE 28/147: Letter from Lt.-Col. R.S. Richmond, MEC, to Colonel H.N.H. Wild, Ministry of Defence, 16 May 1965.

<sup>191</sup> TNA DEFE 28/167: Minute from Colonel H.N.H. Wild, Deputy Director of Forward Plans, to AUS(Pol), 16 December 1966.

<sup>192</sup> TNA DEFE 28/161: Minute from Major P.H. Bartlett, HQ South Arabian Army, to Colonel H.N.H. Wild, Ministry of Defence, 20 June 1967, with attached: 'The Impact of Recent Events in the Middle East on the South Arabian Army'.

successful military withdrawal from Aden", as Jonathan Walker argues, this is only really true in the sense that these local allies refrained from killing further British personnel after the mutiny on 20 June.<sup>193</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Despite the intention to build up units capable of lifting the burden from British battalions, the Federal Regular Army was never permitted to operate in Aden city, the scene for the most intense fighting. The dramatic mutiny in June 1967 has obscured the deep cracks in the FRA's loyalty over many years beforehand. For the crucial decision over the long-term British presence at the Aden base facilities, ministers had to form judgements about their local allies' likely reliability. These allies proved themselves consistently unreliable through a range of behaviours from attempted and actual murder of British personnel, to desertion and foot-dragging on operations. Defence Secretary Denis Healey played a central part in deciding to withdraw from Aden and in re-shaping British defence policy in the 1960s. He knew about the Federal Regular Army's problems as did the senior military officers who advised him. From then on the imperatives became to pump sufficient resources into the federal forces, to monitor them closely, and to sideline them from the most significant operations. Poor language skills and cultural ignorance prevented the British officers in the FRA from ever fully understanding what motivated soldiers or to know how to minimise further disloyal tendencies.

The British government's public declaration in February 1966 of an intent to withdraw certainly accelerated disintegration in the local security forces. By June, as British troops avoided searching federal vehicles smuggling weapons into Aden for the insurgents, to avoid triggering

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<sup>193</sup> Walker, 'The South Arabian Army - A Poisoned Chalice?', 107.

a mutiny, Major-General Willoughby privately questioned whether "it would be a good thing if we got it over with."<sup>194</sup> Brigadier Jack Dye, the final British officer to command the FRA and then the South Arabian Army from June 1967, stated his primary object as to allow the British to "withdraw without firing going up the ramps and fighting their way out." To achieve this, disloyalty had to be not simply managed, but at times tolerated. After appointing one new commanding officer, the battalion's troops held him hostage until he agreed to sack the unpopular man and extricated them both by plane.<sup>195</sup> Disloyalty in Aden probably reached more extreme proportions than in other British decolonisation conflicts. In Palestine approximately 17 soldiers and policemen deserted from British units to join the Israeli forces; one to two hundred others defected to Arab organisations.<sup>196</sup> By June 1954 seven of the 22 infantry battalion in Malaya came from Malayan battalions without any major problems.<sup>197</sup> Kenyan askaris in the King's African Rifles participated in the military campaign to repress the Mau Mau uprising there from 1952 to 1960, stemming mainly from the Kikuyu tribe. Only a small number aided the Mau Mau by supplying arms and ammunition, possibly because Kikuyu soldiers made up a limited proportion of the force.<sup>198</sup> Ethnic affinity between the insurgents and the local security forces can explain fluctuating loyalty up to a point. It is also worth recalling the borderline mutiny threatened by British troops in 1965 over civil prosecutions. The British counter-insurgency in Aden was deeply unpopular on many sides.

This article has explored an array of archival sources for the first time: the private papers of defence secretary Denis Healey and Middle East Land Forces commander John Willoughby,

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<sup>194</sup> IWMD: Papers of Major General Sir John Willoughby, catalogue number Documents.12980. Handwritten diary, entry for 26 June 1966.

<sup>195</sup> IWMSA: Jack M. Dye, catalogue number 23811, reel 10.

<sup>196</sup> Christopher Caden and Nir Arielli, 'British Army and Palestine Police Deserters and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948', *War in History*, 28/1 (2021), 201.

<sup>197</sup> Raffi Gregorian, *The British Army, the Gurkhas and Cold War Strategy in the Far East, 1947-1954* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 172.

<sup>198</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The African rank-and-file: social implications of colonial military service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 212-213.

the security reports compiled by the FRA, intelligence assessments, official correspondence, and oral history recordings. Nevertheless, fully excavating both the federal army's and the British Army's conduct in the conflict is an impossible task when so many vital official records remain closed. Only seven files created by Middle East Land Forces can be viewed at the National Archives in Kew. All the operational, planning and intelligence records made by the much larger Middle East Command - which at peak employed nearly 800 personnel - are missing.<sup>199</sup> In 2013 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office admitted they held at least 600,000 "non-standard files" outside the terms of the Public Records Act.<sup>200</sup> In the inventory, 189 files contain the words "Aden" and/or "Yemen" for the years 1960-1967, in some cases having been created by the Colonial Office's Intelligence and Security Department. Between June and November 2022 Freedom of Information Act requests were submitted for 38 of these files. All were denied on the grounds of national security and/or international relations.<sup>201</sup> Until government departments adopt a more transparent attitude to a conflict which ended 56 years ago, limited progress can be made in further reconstructing a controversial episode in Britain's late imperial history.

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<sup>199</sup> Paget, *Last Post*, 248.

<sup>200</sup> See: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/archive-records>

<sup>201</sup> Letters from Historical Information Rights Team, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to Huw Bennett, 14 September 2022, 18 October 2022, 29 June 2023.

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