

# The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies in the Middle East, 1919-1939

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## **The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies in the Middle East, 1919-1939**

### **General Introduction**

This narrative examines the exercise of so-called 'air control' by the Royal Air Force in the Middle East between the two World Wars. A history of this nature was considered essential because recent events in Iraq and Afghanistan have generated enormous interest across the armed forces and the military studies community in counter-insurgency and other forms of irregular warfare, and in the subject of so-called 'small wars'. There has inevitably been a desire to identify past lessons that might benefit the conduct of current and future operations, and to avoid wasting time, effort and resources on re-inventing the wheel. As no air force in the world has more experience in this field than the RAF, there was an obvious case for examining its past record, the problems that have been faced, the solutions adopted and the lessons identified.

In general, where the employment of air power in small wars and insurgencies is concerned, the lessons of history have not always been very clear. The quantity of accessible published works on the subject is limited; the Air Historical Branch has itself not previously ventured into the air control era.<sup>1</sup> Authors have rarely been eager to highlight tangible links between past and current activity, and the standard of research has left much to be desired. Generalisation, misrepresentation, factual inaccuracy and methodological weakness have between them served to reduce the value of historical analysis, and the study of past operations has in some cases been approached more as an academic exercise than as something that can usefully inform those currently responsible for employing air power.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, air power practitioners have not always embraced the study of irregular warfare very enthusiastically. If land commanders have tended to be proprietorial in their approach to small wars and insurgencies, it is also true that some of their air force counterparts seem to view the subject primarily as a matter for ground troops, with air power's role being confined to the periodic provision of supporting firepower, reconnaissance imagery and air lift. This is partly because there is a lack of appropriate knowledge and expertise; service

training and education are heavily biased towards conventional operations, while irregular warfare is left to small cadres of specialists if it is addressed at all. In the RAF's case, at least, this is not a little ironic, for it has spent far more of its history fighting irregular than conventional adversaries. Indeed, the RAF may well owe its existence as an independent entity to its employment against such opponents in the period considered here.

In what follows there are two principal goals. The first is simply to render more accessible this particular period in the RAF's history; the second is to illustrate some of the more enduring characteristics of air operations against insurgents and other irregulars. A subsidiary objective is the correction of some of the worst flaws in the existing literature; for until the most serious misconceptions are dispelled and reality is disentangled from mythology, history must inevitably remain an under-utilised resource for our otherwise severely stretched armed forces. However, there is no intention of providing a comprehensive account of the RAF's role in every theatre of operations. On grounds of scale alone such an approach would be undesirable, but it is in any case all too easy to submerge key arguments and lessons under a mountain of tactical and historical detail. Therefore the approach here is to examine a representative sample of operations, which between them serve to illustrate the more important and recurring themes.

Four particular theatres are considered. The first, Somaliland, involved only a single short campaign, but still profoundly influenced the subsequent decision to employ air control in Iraq. Somaliland's significance has long been recognised, and yet misconceptions remain about the RAF's role and achievements in the defeat of the so-called 'Mad Mullah'. The second, Iraq, is the best known example of air control, but the popular perception and the reality of RAF activity there during the period of the British mandate are no less widely separated. The common belief that air control in Iraq merely involved the use of offensive air power to maintain internal security could hardly be more mistaken. Our third and fourth case studies then analyse the exercise of air control in Aden, which is generally considered to be a success story for the RAF in the inter-war period, and Palestine, where air control is usually said to have failed.

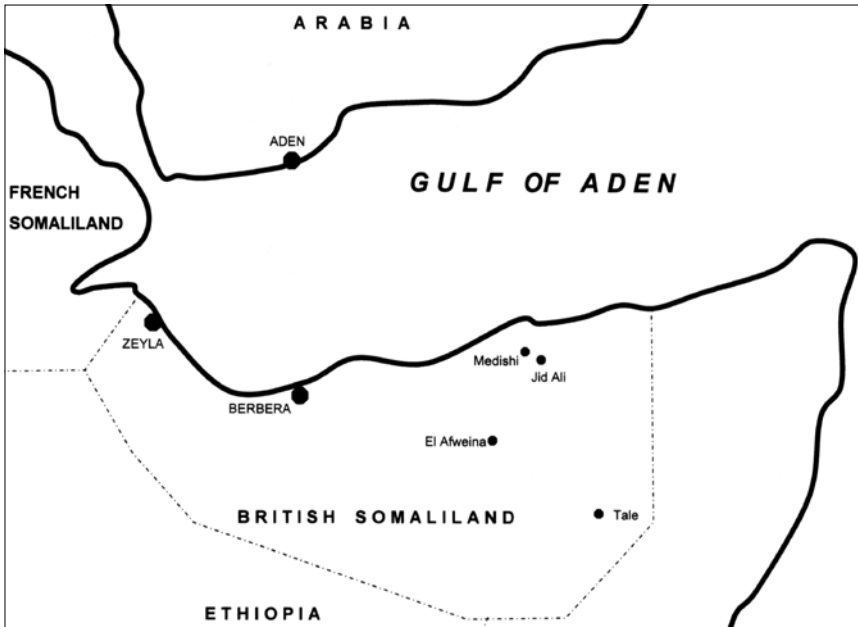
Such terms as small wars, insurgencies and irregular warfare are far from precise and encompass a wide variety of operational scenarios. No two

small wars will ever be the same; they will each be shaped by a multiplicity of influences – political, cultural, economic, social, strategic – and each may consequently generate very different military challenges. Despite this, many analysts, journalists, historians and service personnel are still apt to contend that particular approaches to waging small wars represent ‘good practice’, which can readily be contrasted with ‘bad practice’, and which by implication can be successfully applied to address all eventualities. The history of small wars is often written with the aim of substantiating such views, but this no less regularly results in a grossly distorted depiction of events. The reverse approach is employed here. In other words, the objective throughout is to establish what happened, so that historical fact can form the basis of any broad conclusions. Readers seeking hard and fast solutions to current problems will be disappointed; history, objectively considered, should not be expected to offer any. But it can help by making the defining characteristics and recurrent features of ‘small wars’ far more familiar, and by illustrating both the strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches to their prosecution.

## **British Somaliland**

Historically, the origins of the air control concept have invariably been traced to the RAF’s role in the suppression of the rebellion in Somaliland in 1919. The salient features of this story have been told so many times that they require only the broadest coverage here. However, surprising though it may seem, there are important aspects of the Somaliland operation that have been overlooked by many authors, which shed interesting light on the reality of inter-war colonial air policing.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the armed forces were subjected to drastic economies, which soon called into question the very future of the RAF as an independent service. Trenchard – appointed Chief of Air Staff for the second time in 1919 – was eager to demonstrate the RAF’s potential contribution to colonial defence, and the Somaliland uprising provided him with a perfect opportunity. Although the strength of Mullah Mohammed Abdullah Hassan’s insurgent forces was estimated at just 3,500, of which only 1,000 were equipped with guns, the Army insisted that a large-scale response was required, involving perhaps two divisions. To the government, such a costly venture was unthinkable, so the Colonial Office approached the Air Ministry in the search for a solution,



Map 1. British Somaliland, 1919.

and Trenchard duly recommended the provision of air support for the garrison in Somaliland. He maintained that this would eliminate any need for the deployment of ground troops additional to those already serving in the region.

A single squadron of DH9s was therefore despatched to the colony from Egypt. This was to conduct a series of independent strikes against the more northerly insurgent strongholds at Medishi and Jid Ali, and operate afterwards in support of a small ground force consisting of a so-called Camel Corps, 1½ battalions of regular infantry and 1,500 British-led tribal Levies. Operations began on 21 January 1920, and were successfully concluded about three weeks later. The total cost, estimated at £77,000, was a mere fraction of the expenditure that would have been required to mount a major ground expedition.<sup>3</sup>

This much is very well known, but what does the conduct of operations in Somaliland actually tell us about the relationship between air power and the prosecution of small wars? To begin with, it is important to note that Trenchard's recommended solution was inherently joint: air power would not render ground

operations unnecessary, but it would make them far more efficient and effective. Air action was intended to 'so disperse and demoralise the Dervish following that troops would be enabled to capture the Mullah's stock and destroy his forts.'<sup>4</sup> In keeping with this broad vision, the suppression of the insurgency was actually an operation of considerable sophistication by the standards of the day, involving close collaboration between air and ground forces, as well as civil authorities. The whole enterprise was highly experimental, and it might with hindsight be possible to suggest ways in which air and land forces could have been more effectively integrated.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, at the time, general perceptions were extremely positive. The air commander would later record:

My relations with the Somaliland Field Force were of the most cordial throughout, and I am deeply indebted to Colonel G.H. Summers [the Field Force commander] for the assistance which, through his long experience of Somaliland and its peculiar conditions, he accorded me at all times. The constant understanding between us was a most important factor in the attainment of smooth working throughout, and particularly in the combined operations.<sup>6</sup>

Second, air power was not merely to be employed in an offensive capacity. The DH9s certainly mounted a number of pre-planned attacks on insurgent fortifications, but their various roles also spanned the interdiction of escaping enemy forces, reconnaissance (including photo-reconnaissance), the provision of air presence, contact patrols with forward ground units, communications, leafleting, air transport and casualty evacuation. Moreover, the DH9s often switched roles several times during the course of a single sortie. For example, on 27 January, four aircraft mounted a contact patrol with the Camel Corps, bombed the fort at Jid Ali, maintained air presence in the area, carried out a photo-reconnaissance of Medishi and executed communications tasks in support of other Army elements, including Colonel Summers himself.

Third, Somaliland provides a graphic illustration of the importance of intelligence in small wars and counter-insurgencies. The preliminary operation plan was based on a careful and accurate assessment of the Mullah's likely response to the British offensive, which foresaw the probability of his withdrawal south. To help counter this eventuality, the air commander took the preliminary precaution of establishing a rudimentary forward landing strip at El Afweina.



By the end of January, the British operation was in danger of running out of steam because the Mullah and his supporters appeared to have evaporated into thin air. Then, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, one of his senior subordinates gave himself up and yielded the all-important information that the insurgents had indeed fled south; they had successfully evaded the Camel Corps (which had been deployed to intercept them) and were making their way towards another fortress at Tale, some 100 miles distant. So the DH9s were immediately sent to El Afweina, from where they began mounting air strikes against the Mullah's convoy. Tale was also bombed on 4 February. The fortress was ultimately captured by the Levies on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and the bulk of the Mullah's supporters, including his personal entourage, were afterwards rounded up by the Camel Corps, although he himself escaped.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Somaliland illustrated how air power's combination of penetration and speed of response might have revolutionary implications for colonial policing. It provided the British authorities with a dramatically enhanced yet economical capacity to project force at virtually no notice into remote and inhospitable locations, which had in earlier years been accessed by conventional ground forces only with immense difficulty and at massive expense. Furthermore, it offered at least a partial solution to one of the great recurring dilemmas in the history of small wars – the 'what happens next' factor. This boiled down to the choice between

1. Accepting the innumerable costs of occupying formerly hostile areas for extended periods to ensure their subjugation, and
2. Potentially encouraging further opposition by yielding territory and drawing garrisons down to more affordable proportions.

For ground forces to ensure the long-term pacification of hostile territories there was often no alternative to protracted and costly occupation; withdrawal would invariably be followed by further disturbances. By contrast, air power could be rapidly and repeatedly despatched against specific threats as and when they arose; it was not necessary physically to hold ground.

The broader implications for imperial defence in terms of both cost and capability were immediately obvious. And yet to acknowledge the potential



One DH 9 serving as a rudimentary air ambulance, British Somaliland, 1919.

of air power in this respect was not to imply that air operations were in some way inherently superior to ground operations, or that they should replace them altogether. Rather, it was to accept that air power in certain circumstances provided a means to apply military force against opponents who might otherwise have challenged imperial authority with relative impunity, either because they could not be reached over land or because (at a time of extreme financial retrenchment) the cost of doing so was deemed prohibitive.

## **Iraq**

### **Air Control Doctrine**

The successful suppression of the Somaliland insurgency was a key factor in the British government's decision to make the RAF responsible from October 1922 for both the internal and external security of Iraq. There, two years before, a force of some 60,000 British and Indian troops had proved unable to prevent the outbreak of a serious revolt, and only a fragile stability had been restored after the arrival of numerous reinforcements. In the four months required to suppress the insurrection, British forces suffered 2,269 casualties and inflicted 8,450 on their adversaries.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, the government was confronted by the problem of how Iraq's internal and external security could be provided for in the longer term. Given the straightened financial circumstances of the post-First World War years, the arguments in favour of a substantial drawdown were

inevitably very strong. But a British withdrawal would represent a false economy if it merely rekindled the rebellion. Searching desperately for some more cost-effective means of policing Iraq and her frontiers, the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, accepted Trenchard's proposals for air control.

As a concept, air control has been poorly served by the historical community over the years. Inter-service prejudice and hypocrisy and largely misplaced humanitarian concerns combined with political expediency to generate a powerful critique of the RAF's role in the colonies from the very outset. For the RAF, on the other hand, air control promised to provide a very important justification for its continued status as an independent service, while for the government it potentially offered to lower the cost of imperial defence considerably. The stakes were thus very high, and this predictably caused both opponents and proponents to adopt exaggerated and inflexible postures, which have tended to colour the historiography of the subject ever since.

Particularly unfortunate has been the tendency to confuse air control with the tactic of 'proscription bombing'. Proscription bombing was one approach to the application of independent offensive air action to subdue limited tribal dissidence, 'to induce the enemy to submit, with the minimum destruction of life and property and with due regard to economy in time, money and energy'.<sup>9</sup> According to the RAF's War Manual of 1928, it involved 'interrupting the normal life of the enemy people to such an extent that a continuance of hostilities becomes intolerable'. If it proved impossible to restore order through political processes, insurgents were to be issued with a clear ultimatum threatening air action, which would 'usually include a warning that air attacks may be commenced after a certain time and date, and that women and children should accordingly be removed to places of safety'. Finally,

Once it has become certain that air attack is necessary, no half measures should be considered, and operations must begin and be maintained with adequate forces until their aim is definitely attained.

After an initial series of air strikes designed for maximum impact, the War Manual recommended that 'the use of air power should be directed towards harassing the enemy and maintaining the interruption in their normal life' until they accepted the terms on offer.<sup>10</sup>

But air control was a very much broader concept. In 1930, an Air Staff memorandum on the subject stated that 'the term "air control" does not relate only to the employment of air power upon operations; it includes and connotes its use by political authorities in the ordinary course of peace time administration.'<sup>11</sup> Moreover, even in the specific context of operations, RAF doctrine stressed that air power might be employed in a number of different ways. According to the War Manual, 'the nature of the operations and the method of conducting the campaign will vary considerably according to the object for which they are undertaken and the social and military organization of the enemy against whom they are directed.' It was readily accepted that independent air action would not be appropriate in a variety of circumstances:

17. Aircraft are at a disadvantage when the enemy are located in particularly close or broken country, and have few territorial ties and possessions ... Aircraft are also at a disadvantage when friendly and hostile tribes are intermixed. In such circumstances the best chance of success lies in a well planned combination of the mobility of aircraft with the direct action of land forces.
  
18.
  - (i) In brief, the effectiveness of air power employed against a semi-civilized enemy is dependent upon:-
    - (a) The location and security of suitable air bases.
    - (b) The topography and area of the hostile country.
    - (c) The organization and mode of life of the enemy.
  
  - (ii) Where the enemy is dependent upon settled activities or possessions which are vulnerable to air attack and which lie within operating range of secure air bases, air power unaided may be capable of achieving a decision.
  
  - (iii) In unfavourable conditions where air attack alone cannot be rendered decisive, aircraft should be employed either in co-operation with land forces or in indirect support of land operations as circumstances require.'<sup>12</sup>

Great emphasis was also placed on the morale effect of air power.<sup>13</sup>

This left the door open to a very wide range of independent and joint operations extending far beyond proscription bombing. More than anything else, it is this variety that is illustrated by the RAF's experience in Iraq during the 1920s. Air control did not refer to particular tactics or procedures, but simply to the fact that all British and colonial forces in Iraq operated under the command of an RAF officer. Moreover, proscription bombing was probably the offensive tactic employed least.

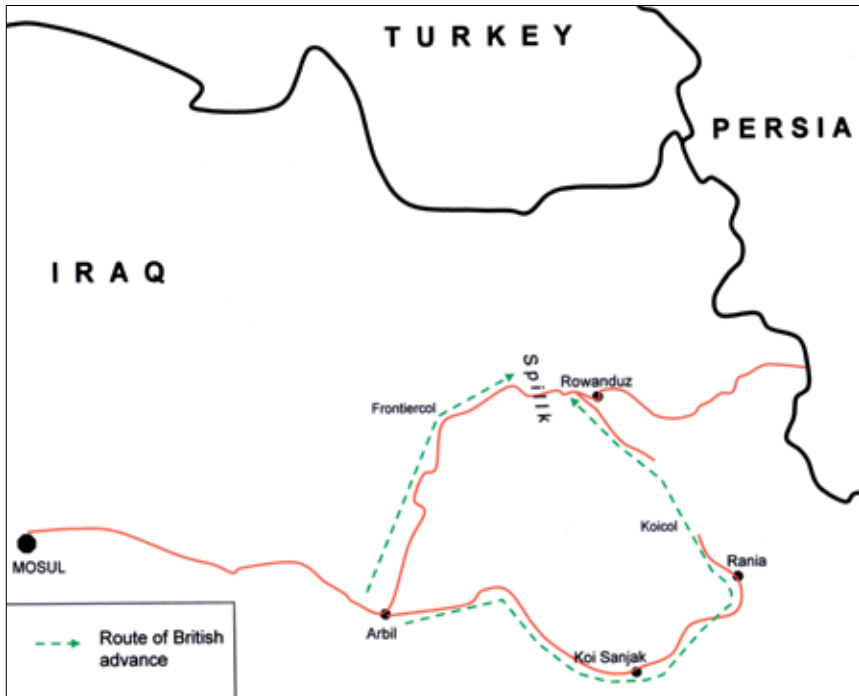
## Northern Iraq

The primary British focus in Iraq in the early 1920s was on the mountainous northern region of Kurdistan, bordering Turkey and Persia (now Iran), where it was necessary to confront the simultaneous threats posed by Turkish territorial



Map 2. Iraq, 1923.

ambitions and Kurdish separatism, which had the potential to destabilise other areas of Iraq. The resulting operations, beginning in February 1923, were very fully described by the Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond, in the *London Gazette* – an entirely open publication. Salmond did not make extravagant claims to the effect that British aims were pursued via independent air action. 'I considered,' he wrote, 'that a combined air and ground operation should be used to attain my two fold objective'.



Map 3. Kurdistan operations, 1923.

Salmond's plans were drawn up in consultation with his senior Army subordinates and with the responsible political authorities. He elected to form two separate brigade-sized columns, one ('Koicol') consisting of British and Indian troops, the other ('Frontiercol') comprising Iraqi Levies. Koicol was sent from Mosul to Koi Sanjak, which faced the most immediate threat from the combined action of Turkish irregulars and the followers of the Kurdish Sheikh Mahmud. Frontiercol was despatched to Rowanduz to block Turkish infiltration

via the Persian frontier, which offered the only snow-free route into Iraq during the winter months (see Map 3). Air support for the two forces (both of which were equipped with RAF mobile pack radio sets) was provided by three squadrons operating from Mosul, while a fourth flying from Kirkuk targeted Mahmoud and his followers in the hills in the Surdash district, to the north of Sulaimaniyah.

As in Somaliland, the most notable features of the air operations in northern Iraq at this time were their variety and (by the standards of the day) their sophistication. Independent air operations were mounted against Mahmoud and his supporters for much of this period, primarily because they were located in remote and mountainous territory well beyond the reach of Salmond's ground troops. In his view, these attacks played an important part in deterring local tribes from rallying to Mahmoud's support, but he never at any point suggested that this had been the decisive factor in the insurgents' defeat. Elsewhere in his despatch, he described how the need to project force rapidly into the region at an early stage in the crisis persuaded him to airlift two companies of the 14<sup>th</sup> Sikhs to Kirkuk. Before his two columns set out on their respective missions, potentially hostile tribes along their route were deluged with air-dropped proclamations bearing the seal of an influential local dignitary exhorting them not to hinder the British advance.

After ground operations began, air reconnaissance helped to identify the key area of enemy resistance along the Levies' route from Irbil to Rowanduz, and Salmond was able to perform his own personal reconnaissance of the area – a ridge of hills known as the Spilik Dagh. 'During this flight,' he wrote,

I was very much impressed with the natural strength of the Spilik position, and, knowing at the same time that the enemy were holding it in force I formed the conclusion that without an enveloping movement it could not be taken without considerable loss.

Essentially, Salmond had in his possession a view of the future battle area that would not have been available to earlier British commanders in Iraq, and this enabled him to deploy his quite limited ground forces effectively and economically. Aircraft furthermore provided the means by which the actions of the two columns could be quickly and easily co-ordinated, either through

message dropping or pick-up, or by actual landings at forward locations to allow senior officers – Salmond included – to discuss progress and plans. On 15 April Salmond directed Koicol to conduct an enveloping action from the south-east of the Spilik, threatening to cut off the Turks by blocking any potential retreat back towards Rowanduz. Frontiercol were to continue their advance from the south-west in the meantime, pinning the enemy in position. Subsequently, the two columns were to link up before launching a co-ordinated assault on the Spilik.

Of the two forces, Koicol faced the more challenging task in the form of an advance north through exceptionally difficult terrain – rugged hills, ridges, and ravines – along a route dominated by the surrounding high ground and limited in places to only the most narrow defile. All the advantages should have belonged to the defenders and yet, having set out on 17 April, Koicol reached the projected rendezvous point just two days later. A major factor in the rapidity of their movement was the combined exploitation of air reconnaissance and air presence – an effective substitute for the picketing operations that would otherwise have had to be undertaken by the ground troops themselves, at considerable cost in both time and resources. On the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, the Turks made their stand, Koicol coming under fire from prepared defensive positions in the hills all around them. But the column suffered just five casualties (all wounded), whereas their adversaries left behind thirty dead when they retired after some three hours fighting.

Aircraft co-operated most effectively throughout the engagement; the enemy in sangars and trenches were bombed and machine gunned; messages were dropped on the Column indicating concealed positions which were occupied by the enemy.

With Koicol now threatening to block their escape route from the Spilik, the Turks were left with no option but to withdraw, and Frontiercol moved into the area unopposed on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Salmond expected to meet further resistance during the final march to Rowanduz, but both air reconnaissance and human intelligence (HUMINT) indicated on the 21<sup>st</sup> that the Turks had evacuated the town, and that the main approaches from the south were also clear. It was learnt soon afterwards that they had crossed the border into Persia and had there been disarmed by the Persian military authorities.





Map 4, Sulaimaniya operations, 1923.

Salmond could now turn his attention to Sheikh Mahmoud, whose main support lay in southern Kurdistan between Sulaimaniya and Surdash. Koicol was withdrawn to Kirkuk, re-equipped and assigned three fresh battalions. In the meantime, proclamations declaring that government troops were soon to occupy Sulaimaniya were dropped right across Mahmoud's main area of influence, and independent air operations were mounted against the villages inhabited by his forces. The new column set out from Kirkuk on 12 May, the general expectation being that Mahmoud would seek to halt them at the Bazian Pass – the only gateway through the Qara Dagh hills, which shielded Sulaimaniya, and another perfect defensive position (see Map 4). Plans were prepared for combined ground and air operations to seize the pass, but air reconnaissance on the 14<sup>th</sup> suggested that Mahmoud had not had time to prepare defences in the area, and also confirmed the presence of a water source near the pass. The assault plan was therefore cancelled, and the column instead embarked on a forced march of 21 miles to this location. An advance guard was

then sent forward to establish a presence in and around the pass.

Only a single range of hills dissected by the Tasluja Pass now lay between the column and Sulaimaniya. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, further intelligence reporting the presence of enemy horsemen at the pass led the column commander to order a second forced march, which was equally successful. Captured correspondence afterwards confirmed that Mahmoud had intended to hold the pass, but his ambitions had been thwarted by the rapidity of the column's advance; they covered 43 miles in two days. That evening, leaflets were dropped into Sulaimaniya ordering local notables out to meet the column, but a number of Mahmoud's supporters escaped during the night, and the air patrols sent out to find them were largely frustrated by poor weather. The column entered Sulaimaniya unopposed on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Salmond then described how they had afterwards moved north into more rugged and mountainous terrain to complete the task of eliminating Mahmoud's power base.

It now remained to break up the semi-military organisation which Sheikh Mahmoud had created in the Surdash-Mirgah area, to turn out his own forces from the villages in which they were established, and to impress those Pishder and Shilantar districts which he had chosen for his stronghold ... Independent air operations against Sheikh Mahmoud were continued throughout this period, and, backed up by the rapid movement of the column, allowed him no chance to organise resistance or to check the disintegration which had at this time seriously depleted the strength of his own irregular forces.

In the execution of these missions, both air and ground forces were careful to discriminate between friendly and hostile elements. As Salmond put it, 'no villages were touched other than those of the Shilantar tribes above-mentioned which had probably above all others been consistently and actively hostile to the government. Inhabitants of other villages were allowed to return and continue their cultivation.' On the 25<sup>th</sup>, news was received that Mahmoud had fled across the border into Persia.

The full range of air operations conducted in support of this campaign encompassed attack, close air support, interdiction, reconnaissance, air presence, leafleting and air transport, which itself comprised communications,

personnel movement, re-supply by both dropping and landing, and casualty and medical evacuation. It is impossible to gauge the impact of the many independent air strikes directed primarily against Mahmoud and his followers between February and May 1923, but it seems very improbable that they were not a significant factor in the relative ease with which his forces were defeated.

On the other hand, there are a number of ways in which the application of air power demonstrably allowed ground operations to be executed more rapidly and economically than in the past. Intelligence disclosing that a particular route or pass was not held by the enemy had truly far-reaching implications for the way in which ground troops were deployed. It provided a basis for fast and aggressive movement, without the precautionary employment of advance guards, patrols and pickets. Air reconnaissance also helped to pinpoint enemy habitations spread across broad expanses of remote country, which could only have been covered by very large and costly ground expeditions, and gave Army commanders a wealth of very valuable tactical information about their adversaries, which contributed much to their ultimate defeat. Offensive air power reduced the need for ground formations to deploy as much organic fire support as they had in the past, while airborne communication enabled geographically separate formations to operate in a mutually supporting manner – a decisive factor in the capture of Rowanduz.

Whether air power could or would have been so effectively and comprehensively exploited in the absence of overall RAF command of British forces in Iraq can only be a matter for conjecture, but considerable professional air input would at the very least have been required at the most senior command levels to realise the true potential of the air medium. Predictably enough, in his despatch, Salmond was keen to highlight the contribution of air power in these operations. 'Throughout their course', he wrote, I was particularly impressed by the many and particular advantages which the informed use of air power had given me for conducting this kind of warfare.' But he did not make the mistake of claiming all the credit for the RAF, and he paid particular tribute to the commander of Koicol, Colonel Commandant B. Vincent.

It was undoubtedly due largely to his strenuous and determined personality and military skill, and to the hard marching by which he thrust his column rapidly forward through every obstacle and difficulty, that Rowanduz was

occupied without any serious loss to either column ... In the Sulimani operations, by the rapidity of his movement, he carried two strong positions before the enemy had time to concentrate, and consequently upset his plans.<sup>14</sup>

Neither Sheikh Mahmoud's insurgency nor the Turkish challenge were eliminated by the British campaign of 1923, but the Turks suspended their territorial claims after they were again defeated in the following year, and a formal treaty settled Anglo-Turkish differences in the region in 1926. By contrast, attempts to establish a new civil administration in Sulaimaniya following the withdrawal of Koicol in June 1923 ended in failure, and Mahmoud afterwards returned from Persia to resume his activities. However, the twin threats which Salmond had confronted – that Mahmoud would draw in the Turks or precipitate unrest in other areas of Iraq – steadily declined in severity, and he was effectively contained in a small area of Kurdistan by combined ground and air operations. In 1927 he was decisively defeated and compelled to leave Iraq. Following the end of the British mandate in 1930 he again sought to mobilise his supporters in southern Kurdistan, and an Iraqi Army force backed by four RAF squadrons then resumed operations against him. He finally surrendered in May 1931.<sup>15</sup>



Govanda Plateau, typical of the terrain through which operations in northern Iraq were conducted in the 1920s and 30s.



A classic single-file ascent into high ground in northern Iraq; air support significantly reduced the difficulties associated with such operations.



Air-land integration: an airfield and Iraqi Army camp, northern Iraq, 1932.



Reconnaissance was the RAF's primary role in the Middle East between the wars; a rebel escape route led across this bridge in northern Iraq.



Iraqi Army picquet with the ground sign 'Y' ('We have nothing for you. All is well. Message ends.')



Another reconnaissance image: rebels shot at low-flying aircraft from the cave at the end of the ridge in the centre of this photograph.

## **Southern Iraq**

From the foregoing account it will be appreciated that the task of air control in northern Iraq extended from counter-insurgency through to the defence of Iraq from external threats, and to the prevention of any link-up between insurgent groups and adversaries from adjacent territories. Elsewhere in Iraq, frontier issues also loomed large in the exercise of air control. During the 1920s there was almost continuous instability along the 500-mile southern border resulting primarily from friction between the tribes of what is now northern Saudi Arabia (then known as the Sultanate of Nejd and ruled by Ibn Sa'ud). The full details lie beyond the scope of this study; suffice to say that by the mid-1920s there were:

1. Resident in Nejd members of Sa'ud's warlike Bedouin tribal grouping, known as the Ikhwan (brotherhood), some of whom were challenging Sa'ud's authority, mounting raids against tribes in southern Iraq and Kuwait.
2. Resident in southern Iraq former Nejd tribes who had fled from the Ikhwan, and were mounting raids back into Nejd.
3. Dispersed around the border area nomadic southern Iraqi tribes which had traditionally brought their livestock to graze on its rich pastures.

None of these groups had any real understanding of (let alone respect for) the southern Iraqi frontiers established after the First World War, and the issues were complicated further by the presence of the Neutral Zone, created by formal agreement between the UK and Sa'ud in 1922. No military or permanent buildings could be located within the zone, and the tribesmen of both Nejd and Iraq were entitled to unimpeded access to its pastures and wells. Static defences could only be constructed well to the north of the zone, and RAF aircraft were not permitted to fly beyond it into Nejd – a prohibition which effectively allowed Ikhwan tribes to move into the border area unobserved and to launch raids without warning (see Map 5).

In 1925, an agreement between Iraq and Sa'ud brought temporary stability for a year or so, and led to the withdrawal of the most southerly Iraqi garrison at Abu Ghar. However, a military presence was re-established there in October





Map 5. The Iraq-Nejd frontier in the 1920s.

1926 following the renewal of raiding activity, and the decision was also taken to construct a more southerly police border post at Busaiya. This was still 50 miles from the Neutral Zone but tactically significant as the only water source for any tribe moving through the area. Ikhwan elements south of the border interpreted this development as a direct challenge. The crisis came to a head in November 1927, when elements of the Mutair tribe crossed into Iraq and attacked the post, killing all but one of its occupants.

By this time, there remained only one British and two Indian battalions in Iraq. Ground tasks were increasingly being fulfilled by the Iraqi Army and the police. There were, however, seven RAF squadrons still available, and three armoured car companies. Air power was initially employed to help re-establish the authority of the government and to reassure the Iraqi populace. One flight from 84 Squadron and two sections of an Armoured Car Wing were sent forward to Abu Ghar, from where patrols were mounted along the border. Iraqi police reoccupied Busaiya and were soon joined by the armoured cars. Air transport from Shaibah was used not only to supply the detachment at Abu Ghar, but also to airlift the labour needed to reconstruct the border post.

The 84 Squadron detachment was withdrawn from Abu Ghar on 23 November, but the Mutair mounted another raid early in December, this time into Kuwait, and a third attack again targeted Iraqi tribes on the 9th. The perpetrators were spotted the same day by an air patrol over the Neutral Zone, but the aircraft were forced to return to base after small-arms fire seriously wounded one of their radio operators, and they were in any case forbidden at that time from venturing further south. This restriction was then lifted, and patrols (but no bomb releases) were also officially sanctioned over Kuwait. Iraqi Army units were flown to Busaiya to man the new fort on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the armoured car sections were then withdrawn.

The search for a more enduring solution illustrates very clearly the attractions that air power offered the British government, compared with land or indeed maritime responses. The task of patrolling the border or of hunting down small and highly mobile raiding parties across large tracts of unmapped and inhospitable desert would have required a far larger ground commitment than the British were willing to sustain. There would also have been serious diplomatic objections to the despatch of ground formations into Nejd. Equally, the High Commissioner's proposal to threaten Sa'ud with a blockade of his coasts was probably considered undesirable on both resource and diplomatic grounds, and it was unclear that he had sufficient authority to restrain the raiders in any case.

Air power in no sense offered an ideal alternative; the border was too long, there were not enough aircraft, targets were indistinct, and the raiders could move with impunity after nightfall. But the RAF were capable of maintaining at least some surveillance of the region at a fraction of the cost involved in mounting a major ground operation, and with a very much more limited footprint, and they could project force far more rapidly to identified trouble spots. Moreover, it could reasonably be expected that more intensive air patrolling would function as a deterrent to tribes like the Mutair in the longer term. On this basis, a task force known as Akforce was created, at first consisting of two main detachments, each of nine aircraft and two armoured car sections. One ('Buscol') was based forward at Busaiya, while the other ('Nucol') deployed further west to Sulman. Again, the forward bases were largely supplied by air, although Sulman also benefited from some overland supply.

The first phase of the operation began on 11 January 1928 and was intended to push the Nejd tribes 70 miles back from the border area. Warning leaflets were dropped directing that the tribes should withdraw or face air attack. The majority complied, but it became clear after a few days that a tougher show of force was necessary. When, after 24 hours, tribes told to move had shown no signs of doing so, warning bombs were dropped well clear of their encampments; no personnel were injured in these attacks. On a few occasions livestock were also strafed. Warning bombs were released 15 times between 18 and 28 January, but tactics were reviewed soon afterwards as it became clear that friendly tribes had ignored instructions to pull back from the frontier area. In the words of one report, 'It was extremely difficult for pilots to discriminate Mutair from Harb, Shammar or Dhafir, all of whom had elements scattered about south of the border.'

In the meantime, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, Ikhwan tribesmen mounted a raid into Kuwait – a country which the UK was bound by treaty to defend. The next day, during their withdrawal, they were intercepted by Kuwaiti ground units, but it was not until the 29<sup>th</sup> that Akforce was even informed of the raid, and there was initially so little intelligence that it was impossible to locate the perpetrators. Then, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, they were spotted and attacked by both the Nucol and Buscol formations. The air attacks caused some casualties and compelled the raiding party to disperse, but two aircraft were at the same time forced down by small-arms fire, although one of these was later recovered. All the crew were rescued.

These developments caused British policy to be substantially revised. Steps were taken both to improve military collaboration and to share intelligence with the Kuwaitis. The use of warning leaflets and bombs was discontinued, and air operations were refocused with the primary objective of targeting the Mutair. Although this inevitably still involved extensive patrolling over the border area, and a more general effort to discourage Nejd tribes from approaching Iraq, it proved possible to withdraw the majority of Akforce aircraft from their forward bases back to Shaibah, which boasted superior support facilities. Here, they were held ready for launch against specific threats as and when they presented themselves.

There was not long to wait. But when, on 16 February, intelligence from the Kuwaitis and from tribes in the border area began to warn of a further raid by

the Mutair, poor weather intervened to hamper air reconnaissance. Finally, on the 18<sup>th</sup>, it was possible to deploy the one remaining flight of 'Buscol' forward to an airstrip located inside the Neutral Zone at Rukhaimiyah. From this position, they could maximise their time airborne over the route which the Mutair had previously taken into Kuwait (effectively the only viable cross-desert route). By exploiting the weather and the cover of darkness, the Mutair were nevertheless able to reach northern Kuwait – a reflection of how rapidly even quite primitive adversaries learn to evade detection from the air – and the raid was executed near Jarishan (on the Iraqi side of the Iraq-Kuwait border) on the 19<sup>th</sup>. But afterwards, as they were attempting to escape, they were constantly harassed by RAF formations flying from both Shaibah and the forward airfields, as well as by the armoured car sections. Attacks were also mounted deep into Nejd at Es Safah, sustained by a forward refuelling base established at virtually no notice at Al Hafar – itself well inside Nejd territory. A section of armoured cars was used to guard the base while the operation was in progress. One aircraft was lost to small-arms fire on the 20<sup>th</sup>; the pilot was killed.

A month of tension followed, as rumours circulated of a further large-scale raid across the border by a force formed out of at least three Ikhwan tribes. Air reconnaissance was maintained well into Nejd, ground units in southern Iraq were strengthened, and the Royal Navy moved three ships to Kuwait. Ultimately, three further elements of Akforce were created at Lossuf ('Gorcol'), Shabicha ('Shabcol') and Kuwait ('Kowcol'). However, in the meantime, Sa'ud agreed to talks with a British government representative at Jeddah, and he met leaders of at least three of the tribes before the conference to urge restraint. By 10 April 'it was evident that, had there been a general concentration of Ikhwan in preparation for a raid, it had now dispersed.'

Ironically, the threat that emerged instead came from elements of the Dhafir tribe, north of the border, who at this critical moment decided to mount a raid into Nejd. Had they succeeded, they might well have derailed the ongoing efforts to settle the border question by peaceful means. Fortunately, on the basis of the intelligence gathering and air reconnaissance that was being conducted to confront a challenge from the opposite direction, the raiding party was intercepted and ordered to return to Iraq. They were then kept under surveillance from the air to ensure their compliance. Halfway back across the Neutral Zone, they were met by the armoured cars; their leaders were then

arrested and brought back to Busaiyah, where they were dealt with by the civil authorities.<sup>16</sup>

The Jeddah conference was ultimately delayed until the summer, but Sa'ud provided a written undertaking to restrain his tribes from raiding. Again, the lull proved temporary, but it bought time for Sa'ud to strengthen his own forces, so that the rebels increasingly found themselves sandwiched between the RAF and the Iraqi Army to the north and Sa'ud to the south, when the raiding was renewed at the end of the year. He defeated one of the three principal tribes, the Ateiba, at the end of 1929, and what remained of the others then fled into Kuwait, where their leaders finally surrendered to the RAF Iraq Command Chief of Staff, Air Vice-Marshal C.S. Burnett, in January 1930. They were returned to Nejd after Sa'ud provided assurances that they would be humanely treated.

RAF operations over the southern Iraqi border in the late 1920s again manifested the tactical diversity which characterised the more general practice of air control between the World Wars. The roles fulfilled between 1927 and 1930 included attack, interdiction, air presence, shows of force, reconnaissance, leafleting and combat search and rescue. Air transport operations included communications, troop carrying, and supply, and were fundamental to the forward deployment of the various RAF detachments.

The early stages of the operation included what might be seen as 'proscription bombing', via the use of warning leaflets and bombs, in an attempt to clear the area immediately south of the border, but the tactic was not employed very forcefully or with much conviction. After two weeks it was abandoned altogether in favour of a far more effective approach based on the improved acquisition and exploitation of intelligence, and close collaboration between all interested parties – the RAF, their ground intelligence network, political officers and other authorities, and the Kuwaitis. Once more, the sophistication of these measures is striking. Intelligence provided a three-day warning of the Mutair raid on Kuwait on 19 February and although, because of the weather, this information could not be exploited to stop the raiders, it was central to the various measures taken to interdict their subsequent retreat. It also supplied a timely warning of the planned Dhafir raid in April. Furthermore, the RAF's capability in the region was sufficiently flexible to allow south-north *and* north-south incursions to be targeted. Most importantly, however, experience gained

in 1928 ensured that the RAF was far better prepared for operations along the southern border when the final and decisive confrontation with the Ikhwan erupted during in the following year.



RAF armoured cars in Iraq: aircraft and armoured cars collaborated closely in operations along the frontier with Nejd in the later 1920s.

## **Internal Security**

While air power had a fundamentally important part to play along Iraq's northern and southern frontiers, in areas other than Kurdistan (where some form of military action would have been essential under any circumstances) the role of air operations in maintaining Iraq's internal security was far more limited. No action was ever taken except at the request of British civilian advisers on the spot, and the request would also have to be considered by the Iraqi Minister of the Interior (and his British advisor) and by the High Commissioner. After that, it might still be turned down by the Air Headquarters.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact that the new Iraqi government instituted what Salmond termed 'a forward policy in administration, bringing under control areas which, other than in name, have never previously been subject to Government, and generally tightening its hand', proscription bombing was very rarely employed to impose government authority. Furthermore, on the few occasions when force or the

threat of force was used, it was always preceded by the issue of official demands that were rejected, by negotiations that failed, by the distribution of warning leaflets or ultimatums that were ignored, or by specific acts of lawlessness. Once again, the RAF readily acknowledged that hardly any of these operations were genuinely 'independent'. The majority were co-ordinated with ground action of some sort, normally by the Iraqi police. The point was not that air power should replace ground activity but that it should (in Salmond's words) 'render a special service in strengthening in all ways, both moral and material, a force of locally raised troops.' There were occasions when air power was used in support of revenue collection; otherwise, air action was used to counter inter-tribal raiding and other disputes, brigandage and miscellaneous outbreaks of civil disobedience.<sup>18</sup>

In the aftermath of the unrest that prevailed throughout Iraq in the 1920-1922 period, the first year of air control was predictably the busiest from the internal security perspective. Furthermore, the RAF were under considerable pressure to prove the viability of the concept to those who had hitherto voiced so much scepticism, among them none other than the British High Commissioner to Iraq, Sir Percy Cox – formerly a Major General in the Indian Army.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in seeking to illustrate the RAF's role in bringing stability to the interior at this time, Salmond was able to cite just five episodes from October to December 1922 when air action had been necessary, mainly against particular southern sheikhs. These operations were evidently very limited in scale, and only three involved the release of any munitions. Their frequency declined steadily over the next year. Salmond listed only six further actions between January and September 1923; of these, two did not involve weapon release, and at least two of the others took the form of single attacks of a demonstrative character.

Just one larger-scale action was launched at the end of this period. All too often, however, this single episode is presented by historians as typical of RAF air control activity in Iraq, whereas it was in fact the exception to the norm. On this occasion, in the Samawah area at the end of 1923, air power was effectively used to enforce a tax demand by the Iraqi authorities. However, in addressing their request for air support, Salmond evidently became convinced that a broader issue was involved – namely, the imposition of government authority on a region that had been free from any type of administration since the insurrection of 1920. Moreover, he was briefed to expect determined resistance.

The Samawah action was for this reason preceded by very much more elaborate preparations than any of the other internal security operations so far described, including a series of conferences involving RAF, intelligence, political, police and government representatives, intensive reconnaissance and intelligence collection, meticulous target selection and the forward deployment of aircraft and force protection units.

By preparing a response in strength, Salmond aimed to secure the desired effects as rapidly as possible; he also wanted to send a clear signal to *all* the inhabitants of the area, while actually targeting only a limited section of their community. Both of these objectives were fully achieved: the offensive phase of air operations lasted just two days and, although only two tribes were targeted,

by the afternoon [of the second day] the majority of the sheikhs and headmen had surrendered, whilst many sheikhs of neighbouring tribes had hurried in to proffer their submission to all the requirements of Government . . . The moral effect of the action taken against these two tribes was so great that it was possible to summon to Samawah all the sheikhs and the principal headmen throughout the whole area. The Minister of the Interior addressed them and laid down certain conditions, which were accepted.<sup>20</sup>

Inevitably there were Iraqi casualties. Moreover, within both the government and the opposition in London there was growing criticism of the use of such methods, particularly in support of revenue collection. So it is hardly surprising that the use of air power to bolster the income of the Iraqi treasury ceased after the first Labour government was formed in January 1924.<sup>21</sup>

But accusations that operations of this nature were ‘inhumane’ would only have been justified if it had been possible to demonstrate that there was some viable alternative ‘humane’ means of achieving the same end, and it would in fact be impossible to sustain such an argument. As Salmond again put it, ‘In no case has action been taken in which it would not have become necessary very shortly to send out ground troops.’<sup>22</sup> Writing in 1923, the formerly doubtful High Commissioner pointed out that this would have required Salmond to despatch his few professional Army battalions into areas that were often unmapped and inaccessible, where they would have had to prosecute larger, more expensive



and more protracted campaigns. In such circumstances, the casualties on both sides would inevitably have been greater. He also argued that air action had a less provocative effect than the traditional ground expeditions. 'Past history has proved that the presence of ground troops in these districts serves as a focus for concentrating rebellious action by the tribes.'<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless the notion that air control was a particularly barbaric administrative technique proved hard for the RAF to counter, in the same way that modern air forces struggle to defend themselves against unfounded accusations to the effect that air operations somehow cause more collateral damage than ground operations. The symbol of a high-technology weapon (military aircraft) being employed to subjugate primitive and impoverished peoples is a powerful one, and has tended historically to prevail against less emotive counter-arguments weighing the costs and benefits of air and ground-based alternatives.

In 1924 there were just two incidents involving the use of air power to maintain internal security in Iraq: one did not involve the release of weapons, and the other was effectively an act of proscription bombing against a single property, which did not involve loss of life. There was afterwards hardly any need for further action of this nature throughout the remaining years of the British mandate.<sup>24</sup>



The bombing of Chabaish, December 1924, one of only two RAF internal security operations outside Kurdistan that year, and the only one involving the release of munitions – after the inhabitants had been warned to leave.

## **Command, Control Communications and Intelligence**

Successive British governments considered that the air control experiment in Iraq was very successful. Predictably, the RAF's task differed from Trenchard's original expectations, requiring as it did a greater emphasis on frontier operations and, with the exception of Kurdistan, only a limited internal security effort. But the results fully matched his predictions. By the late 1920s, only Kurdistan and the southern border were affected by significant unrest or lawlessness. Iraq's own governmental institutions and security forces were developing steadily in preparation for independence, and the number of British and Indian troops stationed there had dramatically declined. There were nine Army battalions in Iraq in 1922; by 1925 there were just four; in 1929 the final British battalion was withdrawn.<sup>25</sup> British military expenditure on Iraq declined from over £7 million in 1922-23 to under £2 million in 1929-1930.<sup>26</sup>

Behind these reductions lay one simple fact. Whereas a particular policing task might formerly have required the deployment of, say, a battalion of conventional ground troops without air support over a period of weeks or months, a comparable task could often (though by no means always) be achieved by a very much smaller number of troops or police within far shorter time-scales when air support was available. An important factor in this respect was the morale effect of air power, which was often in itself enough to overcome actual or potential resistance. No less significant were such defining characteristics of air power as height, reach, flexibility and speed of response.

But to optimise the gains that air power offered, a novel approach to command and control was also necessary. With only limited forces available, elementary principles of war – concentration of force at the decisive point, economy of effort – assumed a heightened significance. The acquisition and transmission of information was of critical importance here. In terms of flying effort, reconnaissance probably exceeded the totality of all other types of operational air tasking in British overseas territories in the 1920s, and we have also noted how aircraft were used for command, control and communication purposes in northern Iraq in 1923. But the intelligence and communications facilities at the disposal of Iraq Command grew considerably in sophistication over time.

It was very quickly realised that the possession of accurate and timely

intelligence was fundamental to the RAF's task. Writing in 1933, the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff declared:

The first condition of air control is intelligence and knowledge of the country. It is most necessary that the Air Force should have had ample opportunities of becoming familiar with the country before air operations begin.

He went on to stress the importance of political intelligence and familiarity with the inhabitants of areas under air control, and of knowledge about 'the habits and lives of the people, what their industries are, how they live and what they live on.'

Just as in every other operation of war it is essential that we should be fully informed of the nature and location of the decisive points ... Without this information we cannot direct the operations economically and accurately. Time will be wasted by ineffective and useless action.

It was no less important to obtain up-to-date intelligence on 'the situation within the tribal territory under control during the operations.'

With a good intelligence service air operations can be conducted with an accuracy which seems almost uncanny to the tribesman. If we are kept informed of the movements of the lashkars or armed bodies of rebels, if we can get information of the locations of the principal leaders, if we can know that some village hitherto immune has now joined with the rebels, or if we can find out that the inhabitants of certain villages are ready to make their submission, all this helps enormously in the conduct both of the use of the bomb and of the propaganda.<sup>27</sup>

The same basic arguments had been written into the RAF War Manual by the end of the inter-war period. According to the Manual,

The success of air operations in undeveloped areas is entirely dependent on good information being available ... The selection of objectives, in itself, requires comprehensive and accurate information on a number of subjects appertaining to the enemy. In addition, it is essential that

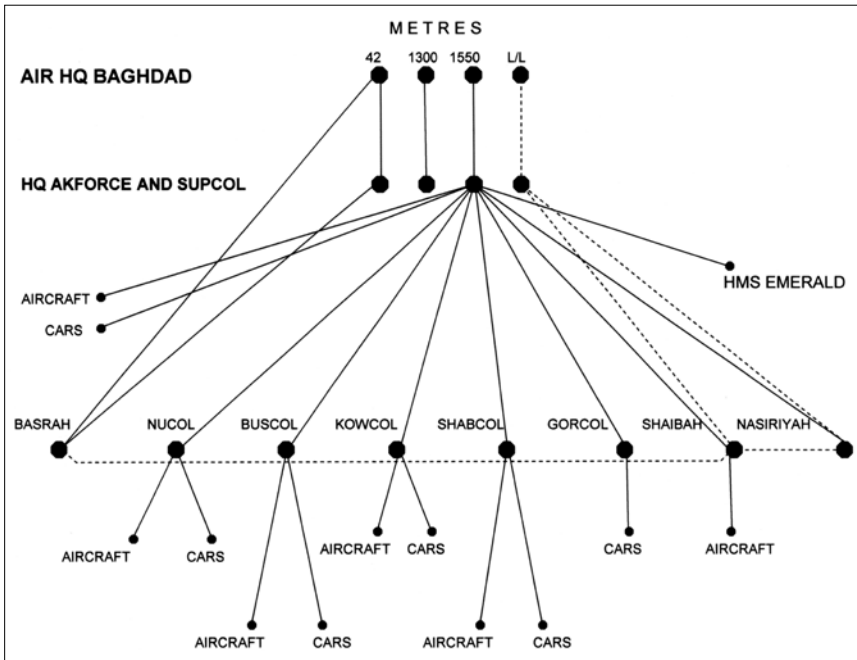
information should constantly be available concerning the effect of the operations up to date.<sup>28</sup>

In the quest for such intelligence, the acquisition of HUMINT – was vital. So the RAF developed its own ground intelligence organisation drawing on the so-called Special Service Officer (SSO) system instituted by the Army in Iraq during the rebellion of 1920. Under this system, specially appointed officers had been sent out to a number of districts to undertake military intelligence work, and to provide the General Headquarters with a source of information independent of the existing British political organisation.

The RAF inherited the SSOs in 1922 and then increased their numbers, appointing officers to all administrative districts. Although they collaborated with political officers in their areas, they were always free to present their personal views and situation reports to the Air Headquarters. Among their various tasks, they were charged with thoroughly acquainting themselves with tribal life; they were required to have an intimate knowledge of the geography and topography of their areas, of routes, and of localities suitable for use as landing grounds if it became necessary to deploy aircraft forward. Officers in frontier districts, as well as observing the internal situation, were responsible for watching closely the dispositions and movements of elements in adjacent countries deemed to represent a potential threat.<sup>29</sup> Arabic speaking, and often living with the tribes they were observing, the SSOs are said to have become 'so attached to their tribesmen that they sometimes almost 'went native,'<sup>30</sup> but they made a vital contribution to RAF operations in Iraq throughout the period of the British mandate.

Equally, air operations in Iraq were underpinned by a system of communications far more advanced than anything previously employed by British forces in the colonies. This promoted situational awareness at every level of the command chain, and allowed commanders to respond rapidly to the developing tactical situation. For example, in the operations against the Ikhwan tribes between 1927 and 1930, Akforce headquarters was at the centre of a single communications net that ultimately spanned rear bases such as Shaibah and Basrah, the SSO at Nasiriyah, all five forward bases, a naval vessel anchored off Kuwait, and many individual aircraft and armoured cars in forward locations. It was also, of course, linked back to the Air Headquarters in Baghdad.

Conventional as this system might appear today, at the time it was virtually unprecedented. Indeed when, on 30 January 1928, Nucol notified Buscol that they had located the Mutair raiding party en route from Kuwait back to Nejd, 'this was the first instance of a formation in the air being informed by W/T [radio] of the location of raiders by another formation engaged in the attack.' The time lag between the receipt of the first information about the raiders spotted on 19 February and the issue of orders for their interception was just 17 minutes, and all subsequent action against them was co-ordinated by radio, as was the attack on Es Safah on the 24<sup>th</sup>. When reports of the large-scale Ikhwan raid began to circulate at the end of March, radio again allowed effective air counter-measures to be initiated immediately.<sup>31</sup>



The communications infrastructure developed for Iraq-Nejd frontier operations, 1928-1930.

### Aviation Advisory Activity

As we have noted, a major British goal in Iraq was the creation of governmental institutions and security forces – principally the Iraqi Army and the police force.

Their expansion in the later 1920s was reflected in Iraq's greater internal stability and in the steady drawdown of British forces in the region. But it was clearly preferable for the Iraqis themselves to control internal security matters, for their troops and police would possess a legitimacy which the British inevitably lacked. In 1930 the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was signed, paving the way for Iraq's independence and entry into the League of Nations in 1932. Although the treaty provided for mutual assistance in the event of war, and the RAF were to retain their bases at Shaibah and Habbaniya, Iraq's government was now to assume responsibility both for her internal and external security. The UK's main role would be the provision of weapons, equipment and training for the Iraqi armed forces.

At this stage the Iraqi Army numbered slightly more than 10,000 personnel. Experience had shown – and continued to show – that the effectiveness of both the Army and the police was very much increased by the availability of air support. So when, in 1930, the decision was taken to create the Royal Iraqi Air Force (RIAF), it represented an entirely logical development of existing British policy. Surprisingly, given the RAF's role in its creation, the RIAF was not an independent service but was instead constructed as an integral part of the Iraqi Army, to support ground operations. A British air inspector was appointed to the staff of the Inspector-General of the Iraqi Army at the beginning of 1931, and five Iraqi pilots were in the meantime trained at Cranwell. They subsequently delivered the first aircraft (five de Havilland Gipsy Moths) to Baghdad on 22 April 1931 – the RIAF's official foundation date – and formed No 1 Squadron RIAF.<sup>32</sup> A training school was opened in Iraq in June 1933, equipped with dual-instruction aircraft and staffed by seconded RAF instructors and Iraqi officers, who had passed through the RAF's Central Flying School. The RIAF's mechanics were originally trained at the RAF Depot at Hinaidi; later on, this task was also taken over by the RIAF, but instruction remained firmly based on the RAF Apprentices' Course at Halton.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1930s, the bulk of Iraqi military expenditure was absorbed by the Army, and the RIAF possessed only 55 aircraft at the beginning of 1936, all of British origin.<sup>34</sup> But this dependence on the UK declined somewhat over the next few years, Italian Savoias and Bredas and American Northrops joining British types like the Gladiator, the Audax and the Vincent. By 1940, the RIAF possessed several army co-operation squadrons, a communication squadron, a fighter

squadron and a heavy bomber squadron.<sup>35</sup>

Recent scholarship on counter-insurgency warfare has repeatedly emphasised the importance of host-nation legitimacy. The training of host-nation air forces to fight their own wars has been described as 'vital' and the so-called 'aviation advisory' function has been held up in some circles as a panacea for the successful prosecution of counter-insurgency air operations.<sup>36</sup> There is plenty of historical evidence to support these arguments. At the same time, sponsor nations must accept that if the concept of legitimacy is to have any meaning they may quickly lose control of the air forces they have created. The air weapon may then be employed in ways that are inimical or even overtly hostile to their interests.

In the final operations mounted against Sheikh Mahmoud in southern Kurdistan between October 1930 and May 1931, the RAF operated within particularly rigorous constraints. The AOC, Air Vice-Marshal E.R. Ludlow-Hewitt, went to exceptional lengths to discriminate between Mahmoud's supporters and the general Kurdish population, repeatedly refusing Iraqi government requests to bomb villages. 'So long as Sheikh Mahmoud was forcibly billeting himself upon professedly loyal villages the best method of dealing with him was by ground troops and police, especially police, and not by aircraft,' he wrote afterwards. Bombing was at first only sanctioned against clearly identified rebel groups positioned well away from human habitations, or in support of troops in contact with the enemy. In time, Mahmoud predictably began exploiting the RAF's reluctance to bomb Kurdish villages to protect himself from air attack, and Ludlow-Hewitt was compelled to revise his tactics. But the villages where Mahmoud and his followers took shelter were meticulously issued with warnings before any bombing began, and this soon resulted in their complete evacuation, so that there were very few casualties on the ground. Pilots were explicitly instructed 'that the aim of the bombing was in every case to be the punishment of the rebels themselves rather than the punishment of the villagers sheltering the rebels.'<sup>37</sup>

Two years later, following Iraq's independence, her armed forces by contrast demonstrated no restraint whatever when they perpetrated a series of atrocities against Assyrians resident in the north. The Assyrians, who were Christians, had developed close ties with the British during the period of the

mandate, providing the majority of personnel for the Iraqi Levies. Their relations with the general Iraqi population had never been close but their association with the British was a source of particular friction with the government and military.

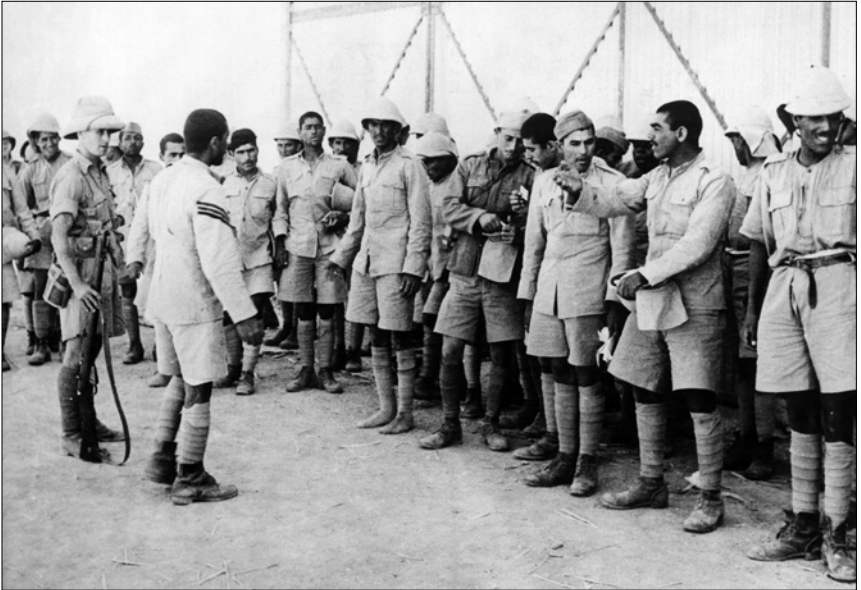
The termination of colonial rule left the Assyrians facing a very uncertain future. In 1932 they attempted unsuccessfully to establish an autonomous enclave in northern Iraq; then, in the summer of 1933, about 1,000 moved into Syria only to be promptly sent back by the French authorities. There were clashes with Iraqi border forces on their return, and the government, fearing a major uprising, sent troops into Simele – the most heavily inhabited Assyrian area. There followed a brutal and completely indiscriminate massacre, extending to around 65 villages, which left an estimated 3,000 Assyrians dead. The RIAF was actively involved, and many of the villages were particularly vulnerable because their younger men were away serving with the Levies. At one stage, Assyrian Levies were actually guarding RIAF aircraft at Mosul that were being used against their compatriots around Simele. The RAF afterwards evacuated 790 of their dependents from Simele to the base at Hinaidi, while one third of Iraq's Assyrian population fled to Syria, never to return.<sup>38</sup>

But worse was to follow in April 1941, when a German-sponsored coup unseated the Iraqi Regent, and a direct confrontation quickly developed between the new government of Rashid Ali and the residual British garrison. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Iraqi armed forces effectively laid siege to the RAF station at Habbaniya, and overt hostilities broke out two days later, the station then coming under heavy artillery bombardment and repeated attacks from the RIAF. Over the next few days, augmented RAF forces directly targeted Iraqi air bases at locations such as Rashid, Baghdad, Washash, Baquba, Sharaban and Mosul. By 10 May the RIAF – the creation of the RAF – had virtually been eliminated by the RAF: 25 of their operational aircraft had been destroyed on the ground or in the air, and between 20 and 30 damaged beyond immediate repair.<sup>39</sup> Such episodes suggest that aviation advisory activity may not necessarily provide quite the panacea that its most vociferous proponents claim. Indeed, in so far as it involves placing a very powerful weapon in the hands of people who cannot necessarily be trusted to use it with wisdom and restraint, it may actually create as many problems as it solves.





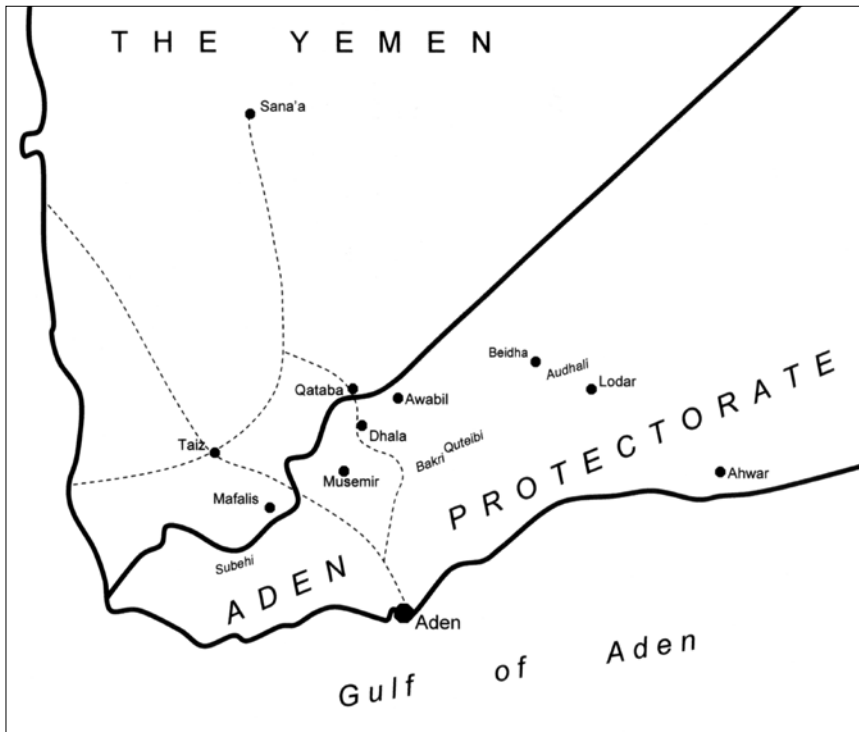
Women and children first: Assyrians evacuated by the RAF after the Simele massacre in 1933.



Erstwhile allies: Iraqi prisoners at Habbaniya in 1941. They had been herded into the station by a series of low flying sorties by RAF aircraft.

## Aden

As in Iraq, air control was employed in Aden from 1928 onwards to provide an economical short-term means of confronting a combination of external and internal threats. The port of Aden had first been claimed by the UK in 1839. Although always very valuable, its strategic importance increased considerably after the construction of the Suez Canal because of its location near the mouth of the Red Sea. It would ultimately be incorporated into a Crown Colony of the same name. Otherwise, over time, the UK presence in the region came to be underpinned by a series of treaties with many different tribes promising protection in return for loyalty. Although these arrangements were originally confined to tribes resident in the immediate vicinity of the port, they eventually spread to more far-flung areas. For this reason – beyond the Crown Colony – Aden became known as a Protectorate. It would ultimately be divided into Western and Eastern Protectorates for administrative reasons (see Map 6).



Map 6. Aden.

The northerly limits of British influence were defined by agreements with Turkey (the other major colonial power with interests in southern Arabia) between 1904 and 1914. During the First World War, Turkish forces crossed the frontier and took up positions around Aden port, severing British links with the tribes beyond; but they were never strong enough to capture the port itself. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of the war, the various tribal treaties were renewed, but the Turks left behind them to the north of Aden the new independent state of Yemen, ruled by the Imam Yahya of Sana'a, head of the Zeidi religious sect. The Imam promptly rejected the Anglo-Turkish boundary and claimed sovereignty over the whole of south-western Arabia. Over the next few years, he gradually extended his influence south, so that Zeidi troops were only 40 miles from the port by 1927. This represented a major challenge both directly and indirectly, by exposing the UK's inability to discharge her treaty obligations to the tribes.

The two-battalion British garrison lacked the strength and resources to do much more than defend Aden's immediate hinterland, and a diplomatic mission to Yemen failed to produce a negotiated settlement to the confrontation. The British were left to contemplate the launch of a punitive ground expedition to the Zeidi-occupied town of Dhala, which was located in an inaccessible and mountainous region 70 miles to the north, and close to the Yemeni frontier. It was estimated that this would involve an entire division and an outlay of between £6 million and £10 million. Such an undertaking also implied an open-ended commitment to the defence of a position very vulnerable to Zeidi counter-attack.

At this stage, the decision was taken to turn Aden's defence over to the RAF. The existing garrison was deemed by the government to be too large and too expensive purely for the defence of the port, while at the same time it was not sufficiently strong to project force further afield. A smaller ground contingent could defend the port just as effectively, while air power could provide a far more economical, rapid and flexible solution to problems in more far-flung areas than the traditional punitive ground expeditions. By withdrawing the two battalions and increasing the RAF's presence from one flight to one squadron, which would work with the support of locally recruited Levies (the Aden Protectorate Levies – APL) or tribal forces, the cost of Aden's defence could be reduced by about £100,000 a year. In the event of any major threat to the port,

the garrison could if necessary be reinforced from elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

As in Iraq, the RAF's primary task in Aden was not counter-insurgency. Rather, it was the elimination of an external threat, in this instance posed by Yemen. With the Yemeni presence removed, the task of maintaining British authority across the entire region would be greatly simplified. Operations commenced in June 1928, after formal British demands for the evacuation of Dhala had been rejected by the Imam. First, warning leaflets were dropped over the main Yemeni towns insisting on the withdrawal of troops from Dhala. Then, when there was no response, a series of air attacks was launched with the aim of demonstrating to tribes within the Protectorate that the Yemeni advance could be halted. Targeting was based partly on preliminary aerial reconnaissance, and partly on a cross-border intelligence network comprising paid agents in Yemen, British agents operating in the frontier area, and travellers and merchants moving between Yemeni and British territory.<sup>41</sup>

For a week, strikes were mounted against the headquarters of the various Yemen frontier districts – Taiz, Mafalis and Qataba, and against villages along the frontier where Yemeni troops were stationed. Owing to the number of different targets, the short duration of these operations, the fact that only a single squadron (8 Squadron) was involved, and the limited bomb-load of their Fairey IIIFs (500lb), the quantity of munitions released over each location was small. The most important target – the barracks at Taiz – received just over six tons of bombs, while less than five were released over the garrisons around Mafalis and Qataba respectively.<sup>42</sup> But the subsequent seizure by one of the Protectorate tribes of a post south of Dhala, which had been held by Zeidi troops for eight years, nevertheless suggested that the air strikes had exerted their desired effect. A counter-attack by Zeidi irregulars was afterwards successfully repulsed.<sup>43</sup>

During the second week of the campaign, 8 Squadron was despatched against targets deeper inside Yemen with the aim of demonstrating to the Imam that no part of his country lay beyond the reach of the RAF. Their attacks, which were directed at garrison buildings and at the houses of military governors, caused widespread dislocation, pilots reporting after a few days that the principal urban centres appeared deserted.

Intelligence was afterwards received that the Imam had refused requests for

reinforcements to be sent to Qataba – a measure that strongly suggested he was unwilling to risk further air attack by strengthening his hold on Dhala. On this basis, it seemed possible that the Protectorate tribes themselves might oust the Zeidis from the town, if they were given sufficient air support. Using tactics reminiscent of those employed by the Americans in Afghanistan in 2001, the RAF used the Emir of Dhala (who had been exiled by the Zeidis eight years before) to organise the operation. He was accompanied by a single British intelligence officer and an RAF radio operator. Between them, they orchestrated a co-ordinated ground and air assault against Dhala, which ousted the Zeidis in just two days. Zeidi counter-attacks against Awabil and Dhala itself ended in failure, and the Imam then ordered his frontier commanders not to mount any more cross-border incursions. The basic British campaign objectives were thus fully achieved within a remarkably short space of time; moreover, as the intensity of flying over the whole period of the operation did not exceed peacetime rates, the only additional expense was incurred on bombs and ammunition and amounted to a sum of just £8,567.<sup>44</sup>

Needless to say, this did not totally eliminate the Yemeni threat, but most further encroachments into Aden were conducted on a hit-and-run basis. There was no longer any systematic Yemeni pursuit of territory within the Protectorate. In October 1933, one of these raids led to the issue an ultimatum to the Imam threatening further air action.<sup>45</sup> Again, he decided to comply with British demands, but this exchange was then followed by talks, which produced the Anglo-Yemeni Treaty of Friendship in the following year.<sup>46</sup>

One of the Imam's most important stipulations during the treaty negotiations was that Yemeni merchants should have secure and unhindered use of the few trade routes that ran between the frontier and Aden port. Assurances were duly given by the British authorities, but the first Yemeni caravans to attempt the journey thereafter came under attack from Protectorate tribes. The British Resident Advisor in Aden brought strong pressure to bear on the RAF to deal with the perpetrators, and this resulted in the launch of a limited action against the Bakri tribe in February 1934, and of a longer proscription campaign against the Quteibi tribe between March and May. Nevertheless, a few further operations were required in the later 1930s in response to renewed raiding along the trade routes.<sup>47</sup>

The maintenance of internal security in Aden was a more complex issue. The treaty system meant that even limited acts of aggression by one tribe or faction against another had political implications: the treaties were obviously of no value to the tribes if Britain did not act in their defence. Equally, the prevailing view among the British authorities was that acts of dissidence could not be ignored, for this would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and would therefore encourage further unrest. Air action could therefore sometimes be initiated in response to apparently very minor transgressions. In 1929, for example, the Subehi tribe was targeted for more than a month following a single murder and the theft of some livestock and two police camels.<sup>48</sup>

But before we accept the widely publicised view that the RAF spent its time in Aden repeatedly bombing defenceless Arab tribes, there are a few points we should keep in mind.<sup>49</sup> First, of course, there was an overriding political requirement to maintain British authority at minimal cost; air power was only ever employed at the request of the civil authorities.<sup>50</sup> Second, very few missions flown by the RAF in Aden in the inter-war period actually involved the release of weapons. The official records show that the RAF took to the air primarily for reconnaissance or training purposes, while air presence, mapping and communications were also major commitments. During this time, discounting missions connected to Yemen and the 1934 treaty, the RAF carried out on average just one live operation per year over the Aden Protectorate. Hostilities were rarely very protracted, and a simple demonstration of firepower on several occasions proved sufficient to bring dissident tribal factions into line.<sup>51</sup> The limited bomb load of the Fairey IIIIF continued to restrict the scale of air action until its replacement by the Vickers Vincent in 1935.<sup>52</sup>

Offensive missions were also subject to rigorous constraints. If weapon release was not merely demonstrative, the RAF would typically target property and sometimes crops and livestock – not people. Warnings were always issued if human habitations were to be bombed, so that they were invariably deserted by the time operations began. The aim, as the RAF repeatedly pointed out, was to disrupt the normal pattern of life – not to kill or maim – and casualty rates on the ground were consequently very low. The campaign against the Quteibi tribe in 1934 resulted in only six or seven fatalities, which were caused by tribesmen tampering with unexploded bombs rather than by direct air attack.<sup>53</sup> On many occasions rebel groups capitulated after warnings were issued, making the use

of force unnecessary.

Beyond this, there were other means by which air power could be employed to maintain order. Upon taking responsibility for Aden's security, the RAF began building a network of around 35 air strips across the Protectorate. This allowed both government and military personnel to reach remote areas far more easily than before. The flow of intelligence improved considerably, and (again, as in Iraq) the RAF appointed a number of specially trained intelligence officers to facilitate this process.

Among the RAF intelligence staff who served in Aden between the world wars, the best known is Flight Lieutenant (later Wing Commander) Aubrey Rickards. Quite apart from co-ordinating tribal operations against Yemen in 1928, he was responsible for a range of other intelligence functions during the campaign, maintaining links with sources north of the frontier, and reporting (by radio) to both the military and political authorities in Aden Colony on developments around Dhala. He also organised the construction of a landing ground there, and played a pivotal role in the subsequent survey and construction of many other airstrips. During a five-year tour, he made a major contribution to the penetration and mapping of hitherto unexplored regions of Aden, and he acted as an important link between air and ground forces, working closely with the APL, with tribal leaders and with the forces under their control. One APL officer later wrote that his knowledge of the country and of its customs was 'encyclopaedic', adding that Rickards 'had the trust of the Arabs to a degree which I have not seen surpassed', although he apparently spoke little Arabic.<sup>54</sup>

Through the efforts of men like Rickards, the authorities in Aden Colony were often alerted to the potential for tribal conflict or unrest at an early stage, and it was possible for them to intervene before any overt outbreak of hostilities or dissidence.<sup>55</sup> For example, in December 1930, September 1931 and May 1932, political officers were flown to Dhala to help resolve disputes between the local tribes. In September 1932 an officer flew to Lodar following a disagreement over trade routes between the Emir of Beidha and the Audhali tribe, and another visit in December 1933 was similarly aimed at easing inter-tribal tensions in the region. Further flights brought political authorities to Marnab in May 1934, to Ahwar in April 1935, and to Dhala and Musemir in June 1935.<sup>56</sup>

There are obvious similarities between the RAF's experiences in Aden and their earlier operations in Iraq. The reality of air control in Aden was a comparable combination of both external and internal security tasks, many of which would have been enormously difficult and expensive to execute with deployed British ground forces. Doctrinally, the RAF's activities in Aden also clearly reflected earlier Iraqi experience. In a public lecture, Air Commodore Charles Portal (later, of course, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Portal of Hungerford), the Air Officer Commanding in Aden in the mid-1930s, openly acknowledged the limitations of air power in colonial policing. Portal argued that in 'fully administered territory where communal or other trouble has got beyond the control of the Civil Power' the Army would always play the leading role. In his words,

The guilty and innocent parts of the population are living close together, anti-government forces rarely come out into the open, and the chief requirement is to separate the combatants or to give physical protection to property and to the many important and vulnerable points which exist in an organised community.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, these tasks could not readily be performed from the air. In such an environment the RAF's role would be to provide support for ground forces, which it could do most effectively through the provision of air transport, close air support, reconnaissance and supply dropping.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, in 'un-administered or loosely administered territory, where the agents of civil control are either non-existent or, if they exist, are too few to cope with any but isolated acts of lawlessness', Portal saw much greater scope for the exploitation of air power. Aden provided an obvious illustration. But Portal was careful even then to acknowledge that ground operations would probably be required as well. It might still 'be necessary for land forces, either Army or Police, to consolidate the position after the tribesman has thrown his hand in, and where the object of the operation is the future administration of the country this subsequent occupation is obviously indispensable, at any rate for a time.'<sup>59</sup>

Otherwise Portal stressed 'the vital importance of intelligence ... You must know a great deal about the country and the people, their resources, their

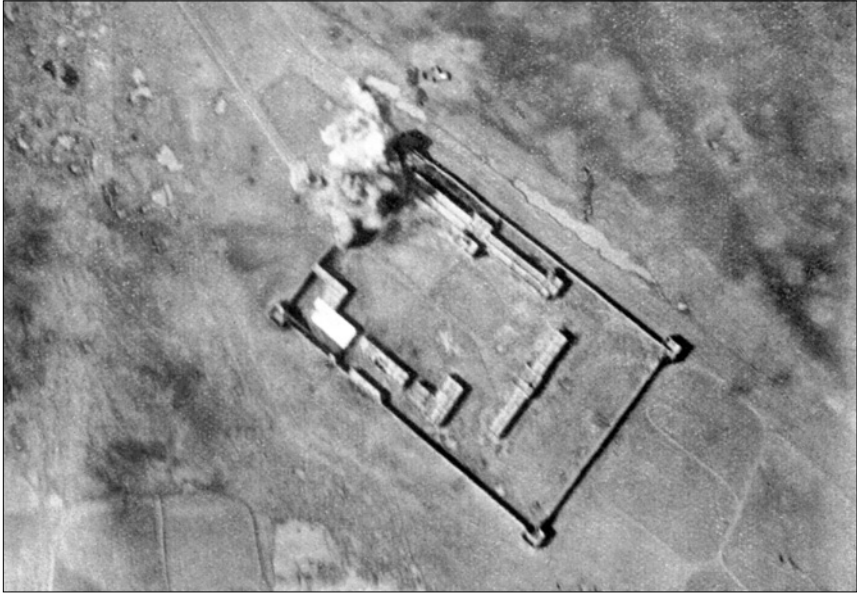


methods of living, and even about their mental processes'. No less essential was 'constant consultation between the civil and military authorities as to how the latest developments can be turned to account.'<sup>60</sup> And finally it was important that air power should function as a carrot as well as a stick. Portal described how considerable efforts had been expended to persuade the typical Aden tribesman to see in the RAF's landing grounds 'a point of contact with civilisation where he could obtain some of its benefits without having to submit to what he regards as their disadvantages.'

We have been very successful in establishing the most friendly relations with a large majority of the tribes: having no misgivings about a possible military occupation of their country, most of them are always ready to extend hospitality to individual officers, whose visit they regard as an honour rather than a nuisance. Once these relations have been formed, the native is not slow to make the fullest use of his opportunities, and the network of unguarded landing grounds throughout the country becomes a very real blessing to him. Medical dispensaries can be established and visited at intervals by any medical officer who has a few hours to spare; serious cases can be brought in by air to hospital; urgent letters can often be carried in the ordinary course of service flying, saving weeks of delay in the correspondence of local chiefs or business men. Above all, Political Officers can visit every district many times a year, instead of perhaps once in several years, to settle disputes, give advice, and keep the Government informed of local conditions.<sup>61</sup>



Bombs bursting near Zubeid, during the advance on Dhala in 1928.



One of several air attacks on Yemeni barracks in 1928.



Fairey IIIFs against a typically mountainous Aden background.



Vickers Vildebeests in Aden, 1937; the construction of airstrips across the Protectorate was fundamental to the exercise of air control.

## Palestine

This study has so far considered two theatres in which air control was broadly successful. But historians have on occasion been strongly critical of the RAF's role in particular parts of the British Empire between the World Wars, and it is often maintained that air control failed completely in Palestine.<sup>62</sup> The rate of Jewish immigration into Palestine rose significantly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the so-called Balfour Declaration\* in 1917 effectively heralded the establishment of a Jewish national home there. Three years later, Palestine was placed under British government in accordance with the terms of another League of Nations mandate.

Hostility developed rapidly between the Arab population and the Jewish immigrant community, spurred on by the growth of Arab nationalism elsewhere in the Middle East. Anti-Jewish riots broke out in Jerusalem in 1920 and in Jaffa in 1921, but the following years were deceptively peaceful. Then, in 1929, a wave of riots and pogroms swept through urban centres like Jerusalem, Hebron and

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\* The Balfour Declaration was a statement of British government policy backing 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. The government declared its intention to use its 'best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.'

Safed, and a second Arab revolt in April 1936 soon threatened to assume the proportions of an outright revolution. Writing in 2001, Corum argued that 'the true limits of air-control doctrine were displayed' at this time.

Air Commodore Arthur Harris, commanding officer of the RAF in Palestine, proffered a characteristic solution to the revolt that foreshadowed his strategy as chief of Bomber Command in World War II. The solution to Arab unrest was to drop "one 250-pound or 500-pound bomb in each village that speaks out of turn ... The only thing the Arab understands is the heavy hand, and sooner or later it will have to be applied." To the dismay of the RAF, the Army rejected this approach, did not apply air control, and restricted the RAF to missions such as flying cover for convoys in ambush-prone rural areas. The Army wisely decided that air control had reached its limits and that the political reaction to employing airpower in largely urban areas would have exacerbated an already ugly situation and brought strong international protests ... Given the bombing accuracy of the RAF in this era, its aircraft would have soon levelled the wrong Arab village. Such an event would have received much publicity and would have brought the RAF's policy of air control under intense criticism. By turning down the RAF's advice in dealing with the Palestinian revolt, the Army saved the RAF and its air-control policy from a grand failure.<sup>63</sup>

This analysis is both misleading and inaccurate in a number of important respects. To begin with, Harris was notorious for his use of what one of his contemporaries described as 'flamboyant hyperbole',<sup>64</sup> and he 'relished provoking others with exaggerated statements'.<sup>65</sup> His recorded opinions and sentiments frequently overstated his true outlook and certainly cannot be taken to reflect an 'official' RAF position. But Corum additionally quotes Harris out of context: his proposal to rely more heavily on bombing (around villages incidentally – not 'largely urban areas') was submitted during the Munich crisis early in September 1938, when Europe stood on the brink of war, and after Palestine had been denuded of British ground troops.<sup>66</sup> Equally, Harris's position was based on the assumption that the British government was not prepared to offer further political concessions to pacify the Arab insurgents. He could hardly have been expected to predict the scale of Britain's political capitulation in the following year's White Paper. In any case, for the bulk of the Arab revolt, he was not even the air commander in Palestine. This position was occupied

initially by Air Commodore (later Air Vice-Marshal) Richard Peirse and then by Air Commodore Roderic Hill. Harris only succeeded Hill in July 1938, and he returned to the UK a year later.<sup>67</sup>

As has already been suggested, senior RAF officers such as Portal did not consider that air control offered a viable solution to the security problems that were likely to arise in countries like Palestine, and argued publicly that in such environments the RAF's proper function was to support ground operations. Equally, we have noted above that this point was spelled out in RAF doctrine from the period. Indeed, particular paragraphs in the RAF's War Manual were almost certainly written with the specific example of Palestine in mind. The War Manual of 1928 noted that 'in very close country and in certain cases, such as the suppression of a turbulent minority in an otherwise inoffensive town, air bombardment is less suitable than military [i.e., ground] action.'<sup>68</sup> And the 1940 Manual stated with regard to the employment of air forces in support of civil police, that

Aircraft can seldom be effectively used in support of civil police authorities in thickly and diversely populated areas. In as much as personnel in the air are usually unable to distinguish between friend and foe, it is imprudent, if not impossible, to employ aircraft in direct attack when civil police are attempting to quell a riot in a thickly populated area. Under such circumstances the support of air forces is best confined to reconnaissance, to the dropping of warning notes, to the conveyance of police authorities and to other roles not entailing the use of the offensive armament of aircraft.<sup>69</sup>

Beyond this, Corum's version of events provides a perfect illustration of how historians of inter-war air policing tend to focus on proscription bombing to the exclusion of all else. In reality, of course, proscription bombing was but one of many ways in which the RAF chose to prosecute small wars and counter-insurgency operations across the British Empire in the 1920s and 30s. There are no obvious grounds for supposing that their response to the Arab rebellions in Palestine should have been confined to proscription bombing, that their tasking should have been less diverse in Palestine than in other countries, or that the role of air power should somehow have been less important because proscription bombing was not employed there.

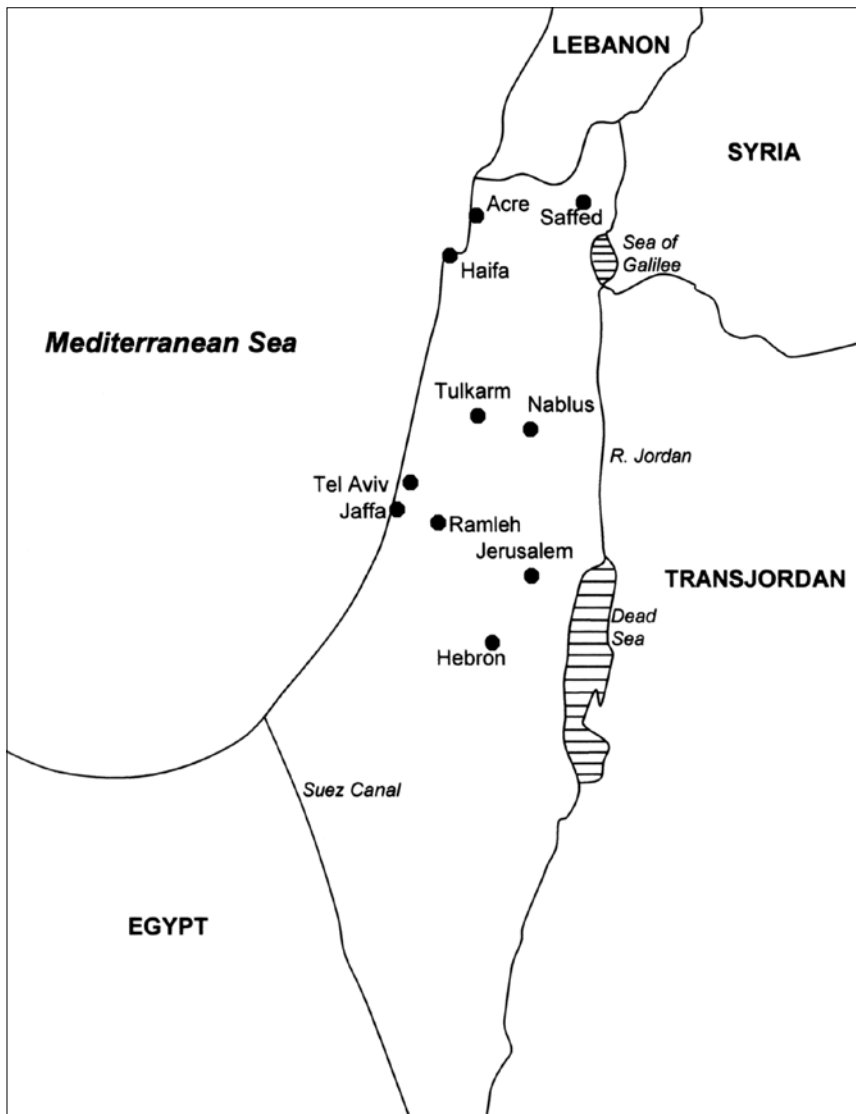
The broad political and financial arguments which led the British government and the RAF to embrace air control in the early 1920s require no further comment. It should simply be noted here that the cost of the Palestine garrison to the British taxpayer fell from £3 million in 1921 to £640,000 in 1925.<sup>70</sup> But the specific decision to place Palestine under the Air Ministry's jurisdiction merits further consideration. Several factors were involved. First, the presence of thousands of British ground troops had failed to prevent the outbreak of the Jerusalem or Jaffa riots in 1920-21; second, partly as a result, civil-military relations in Palestine had become severely strained, and both the civil authorities and Jewish leaders had lost confidence in the Army.<sup>71</sup> Third, the British Army retained a very considerable presence in neighbouring Egypt, so that troops could easily be despatched to Palestine if necessary. Fourth, it was anticipated that the task of maintaining internal security would primarily be fulfilled not by the military but by the Palestinian police (backed by the judiciary), and by a newly-formed paramilitary Gendarmerie.<sup>72</sup> The primary *military* task would be external security.

Beyond this, it is important to remember that Palestine was only part of a single mandated territory that also encompassed Transjordan, and it was believed for much of the 1920s that Transjordan raised the more challenging security problems by virtue of its proximity to Nejd. In 1921 even the War Office expressed doubts that it was strategically necessary to maintain any military forces in Palestine.<sup>73</sup> The instability of Nejd provided strong arguments for assigning the security of all adjacent British-controlled territory to one service department in London. Thus, as the Air Ministry was already responsible for Iraq, there was a clear logic behind the allocation of Transjordan – and along with it Palestine – to the RAF.<sup>74</sup>

Between 1922 and the disturbances of 1929, such aircraft as the RAF kept in the mandate (and most of the armoured cars) were based in Transjordan, and Palestine was very much a secondary consideration.<sup>75</sup> Group Captain P.H.L. Playfair, who commanded RAF forces in the mandate at the time of the 1929 revolt, later recalled:

Strange as it may seem, when Palestine and Transjordan were assigned to the Royal Air Force the idea that trouble might arise in Palestine, and more particularly in Jerusalem, did not seem to have been contemplated, and

certainly the very situation of my Headquarters [at Amman] bore this out. If such gloomy ideas ever occurred to me as to anticipate trouble, it would have been with the Arabs in Transjordan I would have concerned myself...<sup>76</sup>



Map 7. Palestine.

At the same time, the allocation of Transjordan and Palestine to the Air Ministry did not herald the establishment of command arrangements directly comparable with those in countries like Iraq and Aden; indeed the RAF's authority was heavily circumscribed. This was because the commander-in-chief of British forces in the mandate was actually the High Commissioner in Jerusalem, and this appointment was from 1925 largely held by former Army officers: they included Field Marshal Lord Plumer (1925-1928), Lieutenant Colonel John Chancellor (1928-1931), and Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Wauchope (1931-1938). In theory, the C-in-C's post was a purely titular one; in practice, High Commissioners could and did exert considerable influence over security policy, especially during periods of unrest. † Moreover, the senior British forces commander in the mandate at first remained an Army officer – Major General Sir Henry Tudor – who also held a temporary commission as an Air Vice-Marshal. Not until April 1924 (barely a year before Plumer became High Commissioner) was an RAF officer (Air Commodore E.L. Gerrard) appointed British forces commander.

However, this arrangement was itself revised in 1925, when Palestine's stability appeared to provide scope for further economies. It was eventually decided that the remaining British garrison should be withdrawn, and the Gendarmerie disbanded; the police force was to be enlarged by former Gendarmerie personnel;<sup>77</sup> as always, ground troops could be called in from Egypt in time of emergency. Although the Air Staff supported the case for reducing the British Army presence in Palestine, they argued that at least some ground units should be retained there. But the newly-appointed High Commissioner, Plumer, favoured a total withdrawal.<sup>78</sup> Thereafter, until 1929, the only British forces in Transjordan and Palestine were RAF, and thus they came under an RAF officer – a Group Captain. The mandate was reduced from the status of an RAF command to a mere headquarters within Middle East Command.<sup>79</sup>

## **The revolt of 1929**

The view that stability could normally be maintained through only the most limited standing military commitment was broadly substantiated in the period between 1925 and 1929, but the critical requirement which underpinned British

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† British High Commissioners in Iraq exerted far less direct influence over security policy than their counterparts in Palestine, probably because of the expansion of Iraqi governmental and military institutions during the 1920s.



internal security policy in Palestine in this period – the creation of an efficient and reliable police force and judiciary – was manifestly not fulfilled. When the first disturbances occurred in August 1929, the police were taken completely by surprise, and they had lost control by the 23<sup>rd</sup>, leaving the RAF commander – Group Captain Playfair – to confront a wholly unexpected situation. Initially, the forces at his disposal in both Palestine and Transjordan amounted to a single RAF squadron (14 Squadron, flying DH9As), based at Amman, one armoured car company, and the so-called Transjordan Frontier Force – a largely Arab body with British officers, formed to police Transjordan’s border with Nejd and ‘not suitable for [controlling] inter-racial strife’.<sup>80</sup>

Playfair saw no alternative but to concentrate his resources around the two key locations of Jerusalem and Jaffa, and to endeavour to safeguard their Jewish colonies with the very limited manpower available, while using aircraft to patrol outlying areas. All RAF ground personnel in theatre who were not required to support flying activity were additionally despatched to Jerusalem to reinforce the police.<sup>81</sup> Aircraft were at first authorised to strafe formed bodies of Arabs approaching Jewish areas, but not to bomb – an edict from Chancellor which, in the words of a subsequent Air Staff report, reflected ‘all the time-honoured shibboleths such as “women and children” and “legacy of hate” etc.’<sup>82</sup> While Chancellor’s concern to prevent unwelcome civilian casualties is perfectly understandable, his position also ruled out purely demonstrative weapon releases of the sort that had periodically proved very effective in other countries. Furthermore, in both Iraq and Aden, the exploitation of bombing’s morale effect had proved very much more economical in terms of both military and civilian casualties than the deployment of ground troops into hostile areas. Of course, the British faced a very different challenge in these theatres, but later experience in Palestine (during the 1936 rebellion) suggests that Chancellor’s edict may nevertheless have denied to the security forces a weapon which could have been used to considerable advantage in certain circumstances.

An immediate request for a battalion of infantry was submitted to London, and the 1st Battalion South Wales Borderers – then stationed in Egypt – was placed at readiness to proceed to Palestine the following day. It was then decided that a vanguard of two platoons should immediately be airlifted to Ramleh by four Vickers Victorias of 216 Squadron. The four aircraft landed in Palestine early in the evening on the 24<sup>th</sup> (although one was forced to divert to Kolundia, near

Jerusalem), and their passengers were immediately deployed in support of the RAF and the police. The remainder of the battalion arrived by train the following day.<sup>83</sup>

The situation in Jerusalem was brought under control over the next 48 hours, but trouble was increasing in more outlying districts in the meantime.<sup>84</sup> By the 26<sup>th</sup>, it was clear that simultaneous outbreaks of disorder might have to be confronted right across the country, and cross-border incursions by Arab sympathisers from Transjordan, Syria, and Egypt were also predicted. It was therefore decided to request the despatch of two additional infantry battalions to Palestine.<sup>85</sup> A second RAF squadron, Fleet Air Arm elements and two naval landing parties also played a part in the restoration of order during the first week of September.<sup>86</sup> It fell to the RAF to enlarge the communications infrastructure so that action by the different branches of the security forces could be co-ordinated.<sup>87</sup> The expansion of the land component almost to brigade strength resulted in the command of British ground forces in Palestine being assigned to a brigadier, W.G.S. Dobbie; as the most senior British officer in the mandate, he now took over from Group Captain Playfair as British forces commander.<sup>88</sup> But the Air Ministry nevertheless retained overall responsibility for the British military effort.

The role played by air power (as exercised by the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm) was afterwards described by Playfair:

The [Arab] attacks on the outlying [Jewish] colonies gradually extended outwards; the places attacked were generally beyond the perimeter of the area occupied by the military forces.

Given the prevailing shortage of ground troops (and also of mechanised transport), there was no practicable alternative to the use of aircraft to contain these activities. Thus, on the morning of 26 August, the security forces held Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa, while aircraft were employed against dispersed attacks in the Plain of Sharon. The next day, aircraft attacked parties of looters, who had sacked two Jewish enclaves during the night. For the remainder of August, 'regular aircraft patrols [were] carried out to Jewish colonies in the districts beyond the military occupation [and] calls were continually being answered for special patrols to places attacked.'<sup>89</sup> The RAF was also assigned

primary responsibility for policing Palestine's borders. The vast majority of missions were tasked with reconnaissance or armed reconnaissance; a few air presence sorties were also flown, and there was some leafleting.<sup>90</sup>

Brigadier Dobbie afterwards described the air contribution in the following terms:

The aircraft co-operated most effectively with the troops on the ground, giving them timely notice of the movement of marauding bands, and assisting in the rounding up of these bands. The liaison was very close and satisfactory.

On other occasions patrolling aircraft were able to deal from the air with marauders who were attacking or looting Jewish colonies.

Generally speaking the co-operation between the two services has been excellent, due in great measure to the loyal and ungrudging assistance given to me by Group Captain Playfair and the RAF officers serving under his command.<sup>91</sup>

Dobbie also recorded that 'the arrival of even the small force of 1/SWB by air ... had considerable moral and steadying effect out of all proportion to their strength and it became possible to check some of the outrages forthwith in certain areas.'<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, as in other theatres, the availability of air support helped the land commander to employ his forces economically. The intelligence picture was very confused for much of the crisis: a multiplicity of requests for protection poured in from all over Palestine, and rumours of cross-border incursions abounded. Air reconnaissance played a major part in establishing the validity of reported threats, and thus helped to ensure that ground troops were only despatched to the areas where they were most urgently needed.<sup>93</sup>

The restrictions on aerial bombing remained in force until 4 September, when there was some slight relaxation. This was not to allow the RAF to engage in proscription bombing, but to enable aircraft to fulfil the requirements of the land commander, by turning back 'large bodies of armed men ... seen crossing the frontier into Palestine', and by providing fire support 'when ground troops

are in serious difficulties and ask for assistance.<sup>94</sup> In the event, however, calm was restored before any such action became necessary.

As the immediate crisis passed, attention turned to Palestine's future security requirements. On 10 September, Trenchard sent Air Vice-Marshal H.C.T. Dowding out to Palestine, partly to resume overall RAF command of British forces (as an Air Vice-Marshal Dowding outranked Brigadier Dobbie), and partly to prepare an appreciation of the security position, advising on the minimum force which would suffice to maintain order under normal circumstances. Dowding had no knowledge of Palestine, but he had served as chief staff officer at the headquarters of Iraq Command from 1924 to 1926. His record of his first meeting with the High Commissioner sheds interesting light on the reality of senior command relationships in the mandate. 'I called upon him at his office, filled with nothing but polite thoughts,' Dowding wrote, '[but] I was shattered by his suddenly banging the table and telling me not to forget that he was C in C.'<sup>95</sup>

Like Trenchard, Dowding soon concluded that the British ground presence in Palestine need not exceed two battalions in strength, and it is worth noting here that neither the Army nor the High Commissioner in Palestine suggested at this time that a larger force might be needed; again, it was accepted by all parties that reinforcements would be sent from Egypt if necessary. However, Dowding's analysis of Palestine's security problems extended beyond the armed forces. Drawing on his experience in Iraq, he pointed out that 'the chief handicap of the Government was a complete absence of any Intelligence [i.e. criminal intelligence] System',<sup>†</sup> and he also described the police force as 'incredibly inefficient'. His recommendations that both the intelligence services and the police should be reorganised were echoed by a civilian commission of enquiry (the Shaw Commission) in the following year, and were fully accepted by the British government.<sup>96</sup> Yet while the police force was enlarged and overhauled, it remained unreliable, and the threat of prosecution subsequently exerted little deterrent effect, as the punishment of those responsible for the 1929 disturbances was neither prompt nor adequate. Equally, although Palestine's Criminal Investigation Department was reorganised and strengthened, 'the collection of intelligence, particularly as regards political matters, was still far from satisfactory.'<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> The RAF had established the Special Service Officer system in Palestine, but it is unclear how effective it was.

Of course, Dowding had no responsibility for political matters; the task of investigating the causes of the disturbances was left to the Shaw Commission. But he clearly foresaw the likelihood of further unrest unless political concessions were granted to the Arabs. 'If the Zionist policy is to be imposed on the country,' he told Trenchard, 'it can only be imposed by force; for the Arab will never believe that it has any sanction in equity.'<sup>98</sup> Yet, from the government's perspective, the issues were not so clear cut, and the situation remained extremely tense, as little was done to address the fundamental causes of Arab discontent. A further series of Arab riots and demonstrations struck Jerusalem, Haifa and Jaffa in October 1933, after Hitler's accession to power in Germany caused an upsurge in Jewish immigration. The unrest soon ceased, but the Jewish influx was to be sustained throughout the following years. In 1931, around 174,600 Jews lived in Palestine and approximately 693,150 Arabs; respectively they represented around 16 per cent and 72 per cent of the population. By the end of 1936 the number of Jews was approaching 400,000, or around 30 per cent of the total.<sup>99</sup> Immigration on this scale inevitably had very far-reaching economic, social and political consequences, extending well beyond anything that could reasonably have been foreseen in 1929.



An RAF reconnaissance photograph of Jerusalem in 1929; as in other theatres, reconnaissance was the RAF's primary role in Palestine.

After the 1933 riots, RAF commanders in Palestine sought to prepare for further unrest by organising an internal security scheme, which was tested in annual exercises in 1934, 1935 and even in March 1936. The scheme involved all the security forces (as well as some air elements normally based in Egypt) and several government departments. The exercises were designed 'to test out the civil and military communications throughout the country and the intelligence organisation in the collection, collation and rapid distribution of information.'

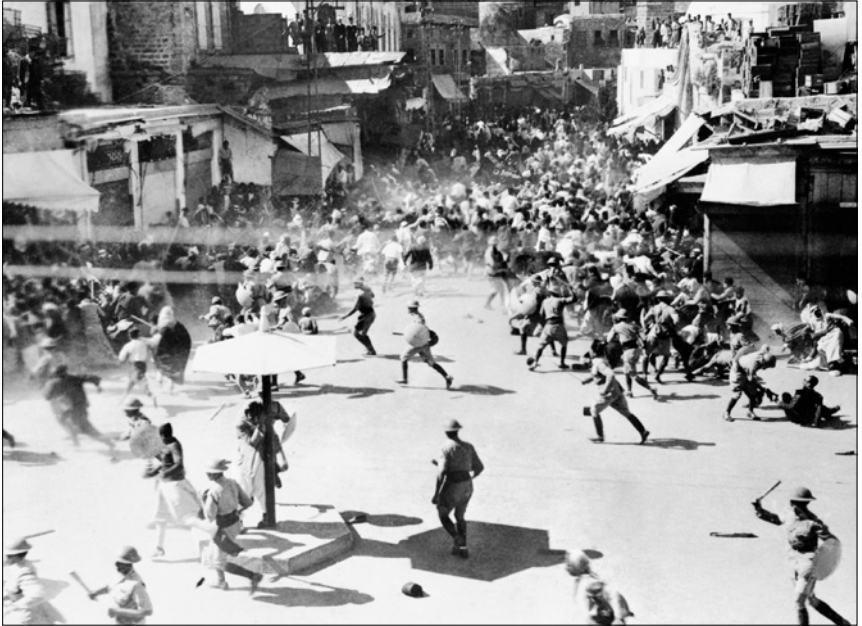
Appropriately, as events turned out, the scenario was 'a general state of insurrection throughout the country'.<sup>100</sup> There were also command staff exercises to examine problems of inter-service co-operation, and emplaning exercises to prepare troops for rapid airlift to potential trouble spots.<sup>101</sup> The prospect of further imminent unrest was presumably also a factor in the mandate's return to full RAF Command status in February 1936. It was at this point that the RAF commander in theatre, Air Commodore Peirse, was promoted Air Vice-Marshal.<sup>102</sup>



British troops boarding a Vickers Victoria; four of these aircraft brought reinforcements rapidly into Palestine after the outbreak of the 1929 revolt.



Air reinforcements: a 208 Squadron Bristol Fighter in Palestine in 1929.



The Jaffa riots of 1933.

## **The revolt of 1936-39**

The Arab revolt of 1936 differed fundamentally from the disturbances of 1929. Whereas Arab hostility had largely been directed towards the Jewish immigrant community in 1929, by 1936 their focus was primarily on the government and the security forces. The revolt was at first manifested in a series of riots, which broke out in Jaffa and Tel Aviv in April, and which rapidly served to generate an unsettled and threatening situation elsewhere in Palestine. There were demonstrations and attacks on Jewish property and crops, and Arab political leaders (organised into the so-called Arab High Committee) declared a general strike on the 21<sup>st</sup> in pursuit of the cessation of Jewish immigration, the prevention of land sales to Jews and the establishment of a national constitutional government. Thereafter, the revolt was characterised by widespread civil disobedience, the destruction or sabotage of civil infrastructure, inter-communal strife and a multiplicity of hostile actions against the government, the security forces, and anyone connected with them, whether Arab or Jew. These ranged from rioting through to sniping, bombing, assassination, ambushes and overt attack by substantial bodies of armed men. There were soon clear signs of external support for the insurgency in the form of leadership, training and weapons supply.

From Air Vice-Marshal Peirse's subsequent despatch, it is obvious that he possessed a very full understanding of the political context of the insurgency. Thus he was not surprised when it became clear that no concession acceptable to the British government, such as the establishment of another Royal Commission, would promptly satisfy Arab demands and persuade the High Committee to suspend the general strike. As he put it, 'the British government had failed to implement the recommendations of previous Commissions of Inquiry, and there was no guarantee that the decision of the Royal Commission would be made effective.'<sup>103</sup> For the time being, therefore, the disturbances would have to be dealt with by enhanced security measures, but Peirse and High Commissioner Wauchope experienced considerable difficulty agreeing on the form that these should take.

We should note, first of all, that Peirse's recommended course of action did not include proscription bombing. When the revolt began he initially responded by instituting the pre-planned internal security scheme, with Wauchope's full support. But the British Chiefs of Staff had agreed after the disturbances of 1929



that prompt action was essential in the event of further unrest.<sup>104</sup> Equally, RAF air control doctrine maintained that 'procrastination and hesitancy in the use of force are always dangerous ... It is the duty of the Air Force Commander in his capacity as adviser to the political authority ... to point out the importance of instantaneous action, and to use his influence within the limits of his proper function to obtain a quick decision.'<sup>105</sup>

For Peirse, therefore, the priority was to act immediately against the insurgency to prevent it from taking hold throughout Palestine. As he put it, 'I hoped that an early display of force, coupled with firm measures, political and military, might convince the [Arab] leaders of the intentions of government.' By contrast, Wauchope at first placed his faith in the promise of a commission of inquiry. 'This last card met with no success,' Peirse wrote, 'but, not unnaturally, the High Commissioner was unwilling to ask for further reinforcements until it had been played.'<sup>106</sup> On 7 May he persuaded Wauchope to submit a limited request for reinforcements amounting to one battalion of infantry, a company of light tanks and (from Iraq) two RAF armoured car sections. At the same time, in consultation with the British ground commander, he divided Palestine into four new military areas. However, no sooner had the reinforcements arrived than Peirse found himself facing increased demands for military escorts and protection, and relief for the police force.<sup>107</sup>

Within a few weeks, the character of the revolt began to change. At first, it had been a largely urban phenomenon, but the most immediate threats to Palestine's principal towns had been addressed by mid-May, and the disturbances were spreading out into rural areas. To confront this development, Peirse was given a second infantry battalion from Egypt, which he promptly sent to Nablus – a particular trouble spot; he was also allocated a Field Company of Royal Engineers to maintain the operation of Palestine's railways. Palestine's four military areas now each became battalion commands.<sup>108</sup>

But the initiative clearly remained with the insurgents; although he evidently favoured a proactive approach, Peirse lacked both the resources and the authority to employ anything more than reactive measures. On the 23rd, he recommended to Wauchope the immediate unification of control of civil government, the police and the armed forces under each of the four military area commanders. But the most Wauchope would agree to (three days later) was a

‘formula which would empower area commanders to draw up military plans in conjunction with civil and police authorities, which, when agreed, should be the responsibility of the military commander to put into effect.’ In any case, ‘it rarely proved possible to carry out any considerable military plan or undertake any consistent military policy, because a commander never knew from day to day what call would be made upon him and because of the inherent reluctance of the administrative officers to impose punitive measures.’<sup>109</sup>

Peirse did succeed in implementing a policy of targeted village searches, after scrutiny of the pattern of security incidents revealed that they were disproportionately centred on a relatively small number of villages and encampments. The searches were undertaken by the predominantly Arab police force and, in Peirse’s view, they ‘had a salutary effect’, so that ‘the initiative was being wrested from the rebels’ by the end of May. Plans were furthermore drawn up for an elaborate operation to quell the insurgency in Jaffa, where the general strike had been initiated by Arab dockyard workers, and where the labyrinthine Old City had fallen entirely under rebel control. Small mobile patrols were also sent out to more remote rural areas in an effort to demonstrate the government’s force-projection capability. But the security task was otherwise a predictable and very conventional one, in which more and more troops became involved in guarding vital installations, such as transport and communications facilities and oil depots, in mounting road and railway patrols and in providing road convoy escorts.<sup>110</sup>

At the start of the rebellion, the RAF’s presence in Palestine and Transjordan was but marginally greater than in 1929, although more capable aircraft had in the meantime entered service. Still based at Amman were 14 Squadron (now equipped with Fairey Gordons), while a single flight from 6 Squadron (operating Hawker Harts) remained at Ramleh. Soon after the crisis erupted, one 14 Squadron flight was moved to Jisr Mejamie airfield in western Transjordan for reconnaissance operations over eastern Palestine. As the number of British ground troops in Palestine increased, so too did demands for air reconnaissance support. The two remaining 6 Squadron flights were therefore deployed to Ramleh from Egypt. With the full squadron now positioned at the airfield, one aircraft was allocated to each of the four battalion commands for reconnaissance duties, while an Air Striking Force of three aircraft was held back for operations in any area.<sup>111</sup>

During the early stages of the crisis, aircraft were prohibited from using any offensive weaponry or munitions. Aircraft shot at from the ground were not even empowered to return fire. When, on 23 May, Peirse flew the British land commander up to Nablus and spotted on the road below a large body of armed Arabs gathered around a car, he could only disperse them by putting his aircraft into a dive and firing off Verey lights. This bizarre episode at least appears to have induced Wauchope to issue detailed instructions regarding the circumstances in which both ground troops and aircraft were authorised to open fire.<sup>112</sup> At first, once again, aircraft were only permitted to use their machine guns. They were authorised to fire at people observed committing acts of violence, at armed gangs clearly demonstrating aggressive intent, in response to fire support requests from ground troops and against particular properties in villages ('not towns or main centres') from which hostile fire had been directed against aircraft or security forces.<sup>113</sup>

Bombing was not permitted until the last week of June, and was constrained by even more restrictive rules than had been applied in 1929. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Peirse's senior staff officer issued the following brief to 6 Squadron:

He said that the experience of 4,000 years had clearly shown that the greatest threat to the internal security of Palestine was from the desert. The advantages of air control over a vast desert area [i.e., Transjordan] were obvious. The difficulty of air control arises, however, in that although Transjordan is a semi-civilised country, Palestine is a civilised one. For that reason, particularly, and because Palestine is the Holy Land, bombing by aircraft has not been allowed.

The situation in Palestine now, however, is of a sufficiently serious nature to justify bombing, within certain strict limitations;

1. Only 20lb bombs are to be used.
2. Bombing is only to be carried out in certain areas laid down by Headquarters, British Forces in Palestine and Transjordan.
3. In those areas bombing must not be carried out within 500 yards of a

village or a building of any kind. There are many sacred buildings and mosques in open areas which must on no account be damaged. The religious fervour of the Arabs must on no account be aroused.

4. Bombing is only to be used where it is more effective than machine gun fire, i.e., against large armed bands.

He subsequently 'impressed the necessity for using the greatest care in bombing.'<sup>114</sup> Bomb release was permitted solely 'against armed bands operating against the security forces' and bombs were not to be used when machine-gun fire would provide the necessary support; they were to be employed only 'for breaking the resistance of an armed band or ambushcade prior to the machine gun attack.'<sup>115</sup>

The two reinforcement battalions that had been despatched to Palestine soon proved to be insufficient. They rapidly found themselves assigned to a multiplicity of tasks extending far beyond what was originally envisaged, and they were also compelled to devote an unexpectedly large effort to their own security. 'Their striking force was thus early reduced below the strength originally estimated.' A further battalion was therefore transferred from Egypt, together with RAF ground elements from Egypt and an Army signals unit, which was required to repair sabotaged telegraph and telephone lines.<sup>116</sup>

From the beginning of June, Peirse's main concern became the emergence and growth of so-called armed bands – armed groups of insurgents operating predominantly in rural areas and engaging in a broad range of activities against government, infrastructure and the security forces. At first, the bands typically numbered 15-20 men, but they soon grew in strength. 'The bands were not out for loot,' Peirse wrote. 'They were fighting what they believed to be a patriotic war in defence of their country against injustice and the threat of Jewish domination.' To make matters worse, a series of mutinies broke out among Arab elements within the police force. The village search task had thereafter to be conducted by the Army, apparently to far less tangible effect; at the same time, the searches inevitably became the target of much hostile Arab propaganda. By mid-July, Peirse was advocating their abandonment but they apparently continued throughout the period of the revolt.<sup>117</sup>

With confidence in the police force declining, Peirse decided to request three more infantry battalions and met the High Commissioner for further discussions on the security situation. Wauchope then reported back to London setting out three possible courses of action:

1. An announcement suspending Jewish immigration until a Royal Commission reported, the Commission to visit Palestine as soon as insurgent activity ceased.
2. Continuation of the present policy, with troop reinforcements.
3. The adoption of such rigorous repressive measures as would intimidate the Arab population sufficiently to bring the insurgency to an end.

At Peirse's request the High Commissioner recorded in his report that 'Air Officer Commanding *and* [author's italics] Officer Commanding British Troops, consider that if the first course is not adopted or fails, the second course would be ineffective and would lead to further dispersion of troops, due to worsening of the situation, and consequent possibility of still further reinforcements being required.' Nevertheless, Wauchope recommended the second course, and the government accepted his advice. The most that Peirse could achieve was the enactment of several emergency laws, which enhanced the powers of the security forces to a limited extent and increased the severity of punishments associated with particular crimes. But any deterrent effect was once more limited by what he described as 'the patent and notorious failure of the administration of the criminal law to secure that speedy justice and salutary punishment should be meted out to rebels and others aiding and abetting lawlessness and crime.'<sup>118</sup>

The three additional battalions now committed to Palestine effectively added a second brigade to the troops already in the mandate, necessitating sweeping changes in command and control arrangements. Peirse's solution would have been considered revolutionary at the time. He created a combined air-land headquarters, in which he retained overall command while command of the two brigades (organised into northern and southern brigade areas) was assigned to Colonel J.F. Evetts. Peirse also enlarged his intelligence organisation, establishing new intelligence areas with headquarters at Nablus and Jaffa to augment the

activities of his existing Special Service Officers at Jerusalem and Haifa.<sup>119</sup>

The challenge posed by the armed bands required the introduction of completely new tactics, involving the closest possible integration between air and ground forces. Peirse's senior staff officer wrote:

In the hill country of Palestine where movement off roads by ground forces is restricted, the destruction of armed bands is best achieved by the action of the Air Striking Force working in close co-operation with a Ground Striking Force in support of ground forces, aircraft or the civil organisation on which attacks develop.

But it was, of course, impossible to mount standing air patrols across Palestine with the resources available. So the Air Striking Force concept was revised, and aircraft from both 6 Squadron at Ramleh and 14 Squadron at Jisr Mejamie were placed at immediate readiness for take-off, so that they could reach within half an hour locations where convoys and patrols had proved vulnerable to attack. Mobile Ground Striking Forces were organised along similar lines. In time, as air reinforcements reached Palestine, the system was extended across the entire country.

From the middle of June onwards, convoys and patrols were accompanied by radio vehicles, so that emergency requests for air support could immediately be transmitted to the Air and Ground Striking Forces – a system known as XX. The XX call was defined as a call for immediate assistance and took priority over all other radio traffic. As soon as aircraft arrived overhead, they were given further directions via a series of visual ground-to-air signals. Ground troops used Verey lights, smoke grenades and a series of numbered signals to guide aircrew on to the enemy and to convey other instructions, such as 'engage enemy', 'maximum assistance required' or 'cease air action'. Primitive as this might all appear from a modern-day perspective, the XX system is nevertheless directly comparable to the modern-day 'Troops-in-Contact' (TiC) system, employed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Peirse,

The rapidity with which the Air Striking Force could be brought to the scene of an attack was a primary factor of success on the numerous occasions in which air and ground forces in co-operation were in action against armed bands ...

The role of the aircraft was to locate and fix the enemy until infantry could close; or if the enemy broke cover to pursue and destroy him. Co-operation between air and ground forces reached a very high standard and the losses inflicted on the armed bands were exceptionally heavy in proportion to their numbers.<sup>120</sup>

However, the Air Striking Force itself suffered a number of losses, for reasons described by a later commander of British forces in Palestine.

It is always necessary that, before taking any action against men on the ground, the pilots should descend within a few hundred feet of the ground in order to ascertain beyond doubt that the personnel against whom it is proposed to take action are armed and are opposing the troops. This entails frequent and considerable risks; it is in fact only by drawing fire at low heights that the pilots are often able to ascertain the presence of armed men concealed in groves or behind walls.<sup>121</sup>

Aircraft were often hit by small arms fire, three being forced to land on 21 June alone. Many personnel sustained minor wounds, although the first fatalities did not occur until September.<sup>122</sup>

The Air Striking Force answered fourteen XX calls during second half of June 1936, when aircraft became airborne on average just six minutes from the time the call was initiated. The aircraft assigned to the brigades executed convoy and train escort, road patrol and reconnaissance tasking. There were communications flights normally involving the transport of individual senior Army officers, and some 210,000 pamphlets were dropped over 980 villages. Photo-reconnaissance was another major commitment, nearly 1,300 vertical and 126 oblique images being captured. Leaflet drops and photo-reconnaissance were both extensively employed in support of the operation to suppress the revolt in Jaffa, which involved the demolition of substantial areas of the Old City so that new, broad roads could be constructed straight through the main centres of resistance.<sup>123</sup> The RAF also dropped food and supplies to isolated ground units, allowing them to be sustained in remote locations and reducing their dependence on vulnerable overland supply lines.<sup>124</sup>

Otherwise, Peirse took such steps as were open to him within the resource

and policy constraints imposed by Wauchope and the British government. The Army, the RAF, the Transjordan Frontier Force and the police were all employed along sections of the frontier in an effort to prevent arms smuggling into Palestine, while Navy destroyers patrolled the coast. The Army's infantry battalions were supplemented by mechanised forces, both tanks and armoured cars (Army and RAF) being used for patrol, escort and guard duties. When the pressure of operations threatened to become too great, Peirse succeeded in obtaining an additional mechanised cavalry regiment (the 8<sup>th</sup> Hussars) from Egypt. At the same time, the RAF component was enlarged by the arrival of 33 Squadron.<sup>125</sup>

But the armed bands became, if anything, even more active in districts such as Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin, and there were also several terrorist incidents involving bomb-throwing and assassination. At the beginning of July, at the High Commissioner's request, Peirse submitted a military appreciation, which was once again highly critical and which warned of dire consequences 'the longer the existing state of affairs was permitted to continue . . . I considered time to be the most important factor and that active military measures were essential to restore order as soon as possible,' he wrote. In keeping with his warning at the beginning of June, he pointed out that even the augmented troop levels in Palestine were proving insufficient, and he therefore recommended the despatch of further reinforcements, which began arriving on the 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>126</sup>

Intelligence to the effect that the armed bands were largely being raised and directed from a base in the Samaria region led to the launch of a substantial operation in this area between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of July. But it was impossible to conceal the military preparations, and the rebels dispersed before the British assault commenced. Samaria was effectively pacified, but the High Commissioner subsequently felt compelled to tighten the security forces' Rules of Engagement, after a number of Arab civilians were shot by British troops. 'Whilst these instructions were intended to protect both the innocent Arab and the soldier alike, they proved unduly restrictive for the latter,' Peirse commented. Revised Rules proved very difficult to draft in a manner acceptable to both the civil and military authorities, and there was a lengthy delay before they were agreed.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout July, the number of security incidents continued to rise. When



the armed bands could be engaged in the open, the XX system coupled with the superior training and firepower of the British armed forces allowed heavy casualties to be inflicted on the insurgents. During the month, 13 XX calls were answered; aircraft fired 8,000 rounds of ammunition, and dropped 205 bombs. But the rebels were quick to adapt their tactics in response to the various British countermeasures. Increasingly, it appeared that the only means of ensuring the long-term suppression of insurgent activity lay in the physical occupation of more and more territory, at inevitably exorbitant cost in terms of manpower and other resources. Localities where patrols and convoys were frequently attacked were systematically picquetted at anything from platoon to company strength, in semi-permanent self-contained wired and sangared encampments.<sup>128</sup>

The security situation deteriorated further still in August. An attempt at mediation by the Emir of Transjordan merely engendered further Arab hostility when it became clear that he was not empowered to offer concessions on Jewish immigration on behalf of the British government. The government's announcement of a new Royal Commission (the Peel Commission) exerted no immediate impact on the revolt. For a time, the general strike spread to key workers in Haifa, who had previously refused to down tools. Terrorist activity assumed even more menacing proportions, and the involvement of both the Arab and Jewish communities created, in Peirse's words, 'great danger of a fierce outbreak of interracial strife, which in effect would have been civil war.' Then it was learnt that a staunchly anti-colonialist Iraqi revolutionary leader, Fauzi Al Quwaqji, had joined rebel forces in Palestine. Simultaneously, the leadership, tactics and organisation of the armed bands improved to an extent that suggested professional military instruction; there was evidence that they were benefiting from improved weapon and ammunition supply, and bands began to appear in areas that had hitherto been relatively quiescent.<sup>129</sup>

It was at this point – and in this context – that the exasperated Peirse finally ran out of patience.

I now reported to the High Commissioner that, do what we could with the military 'in aid of the civil power', we were not now holding the situation and that if we continued with the present policy we might have to face at any moment a most serious situation; civil war, widespread terrorism and

assassinations, coupled with complete boycott of Government by all Arab officials and employees. I considered we had to face one of two alternatives – negotiation with the rebels or martial law.

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, he made more specific recommendations. Now – some four months into the crisis – he suggested as one possible option the employment of an ‘air control plan’.<sup>130</sup> This proposal was afterwards misrepresented in a number of contemporary documents, a reflection of the extent to which air control was still poorly understood by some in Whitehall, and actively opposed by others. The Cabinet was left with the impression that the RAF was advocating the direct targeting of civilians.<sup>131</sup> Yet this was not at all what Peirse had in mind. Instead, his idea was to use air power in the same way that it had been employed in other Middle Eastern countries, namely by exploiting the morale effect of geographically limited bombing operations in an attempt to halt the rebellion over a very much larger area. A few key centres of insurgent activity would have been selected as targets, and their inhabitants would have been given ample warning and opportunity to leave before the air strikes began.

Coincidentally, early the following month, 6 Squadron were confronted with the task of destroying a number of trenches dug by rebels south-east of Juneid. For this purpose, they were permitted to use 112lb bombs with delayed-action fuses for the first time. British ground forces subsequently reported:

The air bombing of Point 771 on 6<sup>th</sup><sup>5</sup> September appears to have made more impression on the inhabitants of Nablus than any other recent event of this kind. A number of casualties in that action were inflicted on an armed band composed partly of local people, and the inhabitants could see and hear the action from their own doorstep. It is probable that this incident had done more to prevent local recruits from joining the gangs than any number of warnings could have achieved.<sup>132</sup>

This was very much the sort of effect that Peirse had in mind when he recommended the introduction of air control measures in Palestine. It is not surprising to learn that, a few days later, 6 Squadron received general permission

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<sup>5</sup> The bombing actually occurred on the 7th.

to employ 112lb bombs.<sup>133</sup> Peirse did not suggest that air control was the only way of dealing with the crisis. On the contrary, he also drew up proposals for using ground forces with air support. However, he pointed out that this approach would require the commitment of ground troops in very much greater numbers: at least two further brigades would be necessary.<sup>134</sup>

On 2 September the Cabinet met to consider future policy towards Palestine. It was decided to despatch a further infantry division, but there was to be no resort to air control. No political concessions were to be made until the revolt ceased, martial law would be introduced at an appropriate time, and military action would be intensified. The Cabinet's ruling heralded the end of Peirse's very difficult term as commander of British forces; clearly, given the number of ground troops involved, the counter-insurgency operation in Palestine required the overall leadership of an Army officer, and Lieutenant General J.G. Dill was therefore appointed to take over the command from mid-September, overall responsibility for Palestine passing (in theory temporarily) from the Air Ministry to the War Office. The combined headquarters in Palestine was nevertheless retained.<sup>135</sup>

Peirse may have been disappointed by the Cabinet's refusal to consider air control in Palestine (his views are not actually recorded in the available documents), but the other main features of British policy – martial law, intensified military activity and (in the absence of air control) significantly increased troop deployments – all stemmed directly from recommendations he had been making since May. According to his account, the number of security incidents almost immediately halved after the new measures were announced in Palestine on 4 September.<sup>136</sup> Although martial law was never actually introduced, the first phase of the revolt was effectively brought to an end by the threat of a tougher security policy, growing concerns over the economic consequences of further unrest, and hopes that the Peel Commission would produce a favourable settlement. The general strike was called off on 12 October.<sup>137</sup>

Writing in August, the British land commander, Colonel Evetts, stated:

Up to date the support given by the Air Striking Force has been excellent and undoubtedly has enabled the infantry to close with the enemy and in some cases surround him.

He went on to describe a typical action in July when aircraft had responded to a XX call.

The [ground] patrol, seeing the aircraft, fired Verey lights to indicate the direction of the northern enemy party ... The aircraft flew to the direction indicated and bombed the enemy ... Aircraft then pinned the enemy while the patrol manoeuvred to surround them.<sup>138</sup>

In a similar vein, Dill wrote in 1937 that

The value of the Air Force, when arrangements can be made for it to be at instant call, has been most marked ... Rebels hold the Air Force in such respect that on occasions it had the effect of driving them to cover or dispersing them before the troops could get in touch with them.<sup>139</sup>

He also recorded that

When it came to striking the enemy in the hills it was usually upon the bombs and guns of his aircraft that the commander would rely for a concentration of force at the decisive point. The fact that in some months more than 50 per cent of enemy casualties resulted from air action bears witness to their effect.

There were few engagements in which aircraft and troops did not work together in very close co-operation ... Practically every case of a successful attack on armed rebels resulted from the combined efforts of air and land forces.<sup>140</sup>

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The revolt was renewed in September 1937, after the Arabs rejected the Peel Commission's recommendations for partitioning Palestine. The British responded more aggressively than in the previous year, but troop reductions (down to two brigades) left them overstretched, and Samaria and Galilee were again under the control of armed bands by October. At first, British forces employed classic cordon-and-search tactics using mobile ground columns with air support. But the policy of physical occupation was then resumed, following the arrival of reinforcements, via the construction of Army and police posts across a

number of the most troublesome areas. Having again been reduced to one flight, 6 Squadron was brought back up to full strength, and the XX system was resurrected for the provision of emergency air support.<sup>141</sup>

Nevertheless, substantial swathes of the countryside were effectively yielded to the rebels during the summer of 1938, to the extent that they could in some areas operate their own courts and raise taxes.<sup>142</sup> The situation therefore remained very threatening when, at the beginning of September, the crisis between Germany and Czechoslovakia compelled the British government to redeploy troops from Palestine to Egypt in considerable numbers. It was in this context – i.e., in the event of a European war and ‘cut to the bone for troops’ – that Harris proposed the use of air control measures.<sup>143</sup> Of course, war did not break out in 1938, but the government and the Chiefs of Staff concluded in the aftermath of Munich that Palestine was a prohibitively expensive distraction; the Arab revolt had to be brought to a prompt conclusion. This was to be achieved via another increase in the number of ground troops (back up to two divisions), combined with sweeping political concessions. The 1939 White Paper promised independence for Palestine within a decade, and imposed drastic curbs upon Jewish immigration and land purchase.<sup>144</sup> The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 may also have had some effect on the Arab population. According to a report by the Air Headquarters prepared soon after the declaration of hostilities, ‘Protestations of loyalty have been made in many parts of Palestine, indicating a desire to put aside local political issues and co-operate with the government.’ By the end of the year, the rebellion was at an end.<sup>145</sup>

For the RAF the essential characteristics of operations over Palestine changed little throughout this period. Although based in Transjordan, 14 Squadron regularly saw action over Palestine; between March and June 1938 they were re-equipped with the Vickers Wellesley, which represented an immense advance over the Gordon. In the summer of 1938, 6 Squadron were reinforced by 211 Squadron and then (after 211 Squadron were reassigned to Egypt) by the Gladiators of 33 Squadron. As the Gladiators were equipped with four front machine guns, they proved far more effective than Harts or Hart derivatives for tactical support missions.<sup>146</sup> Aircraft occasionally took offensive action independently of ground forces, but tasking was predominantly divided between close support (including XX), reconnaissance (visual and photographic),

air presence, convoy escort and re-supply. Not until 18 March 1940 was the XX system finally suspended.<sup>147</sup>

The main tactical innovation commonly associated with the later stages of the revolt was the so-called 'air cordon', employed when ground forces were intending to search villages or settlements. In the words of the RAF War Manual,

The main principle involved is that aircraft can arrive without warning over the area to be searched and can, by use of their defensive weapons, prevent the escape of those caught within the air cordon. As soon as the cordon is established, the land forces, without any necessity for taking precautions to conceal their movements and without the fatigue and delay attendant upon involved encircling tactics, are at liberty to proceed to the search area rapidly and by the most convenient means . . . Pamphlets are dropped on the area warning the inhabitants to remain within that area on pain of being shot from the air if they attempt to emerge.<sup>148</sup>

Relays were often mounted so that, when fuel considerations forced the cordoning aircraft to return to base, others would immediately take their place.<sup>149</sup>

Harris is normally credited with the introduction of the air cordon. However, as we have seen, aircraft had been used to 'pin' insurgents since the summer of 1936. The air cordon merely formalised such tactics and extended their use beyond specific buildings or other rebel-occupied positions. The system nevertheless proved an instant success; it was highly valued by the Army and regularly employed.<sup>150</sup> In August 1939, for example, some 23 such operations involving 77 sorties imposed cordons on 31 villages.<sup>151</sup> On one occasion, intelligence reported the presence of 'the notorious terrorist Said Salim Said and his band' at the village of Beit Lid, which was situated on the top of a high conical hill, offering extensive views in all directions. It would have been impossible for land forces to approach the village unseen in daylight, and the insurgents would almost certainly have escaped if Beit Lid had not been cordoned from the air. Said Salim Said was killed in the subsequent fire fight, and a large quantity of arms and ammunition was captured. The commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division afterwards paid tribute to the role of the RAF in this successful action:

The happy results of the operation, by which Samaria has been rid of one

of its most formidable nuisances, were considerably due to the merciless 'air pin' by which escape was prevented.<sup>152</sup>

But as the RAF modified their tactics, so also did the insurgents become noticeably more air-minded, confining much of their activity to the hours of darkness, and developing other passive air defence tactics, such as movement, concealment and dispersal.<sup>153</sup> Again, low-flying aircraft were regularly targeted by small-arms fire. Four 6 Squadron personnel died when their aircraft (Hawker Hardys) were shot down in August 1938. In October, another Hardy was forced to land on a road near Hebron, and two more were shot down, their crews bailing out; the pilot of one of these aircraft was never seen again. A 33 Squadron Gladiator force landed on 6 November, and a pilot died a few days later from wounds received after his aircraft was shot down. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, another pilot was killed when his Gladiator was brought down by small-arms fire.<sup>154</sup> The high risks involved in operations over Palestine are reflected in 6 Squadron's medal haul between 1936 and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, which included three DSOs, four DFCs nine DFMs and two OBEs.<sup>155</sup>

As air control was not used in Palestine, the RAF had no opportunity to (in Corum's words) 'level the wrong Arab village', but the Army and the police more than made up for this via a wide range of quite deliberate tactics, including some that extended far beyond those officially sanctioned. Throughout the rebellion, Arab property was systematically ransacked and looted; livestock and crops were confiscated, and many individual buildings were levelled. In its annual report to the League of Nations, the British government openly described how troops had demolished 53 houses in the village of Baqa el Gharbiya in July 1938, and the northern village of Mi'ar was entirely destroyed in October. Innocent civilians were shot by the 8<sup>th</sup> Hussars in Samaria in July 1936, while troops from the Royal Ulster Rifles massacred 20 civilians at Al-Bassa in September 1938. The following summer, the Black Watch killed at least eleven more at Halhul by locking them in a cage in direct sunshine and denying them water.<sup>156</sup>

The limits of air control may indeed have been reached in Palestine. Yet it is equally true that the British experience there does not exactly provide a ringing endorsement for more land-centric alternatives. An increase in the Army's presence from two battalions to two brigades during the summer of 1936 did not bring the Arab rebellion under control, and it ultimately proved necessary to

deploy some 25,000 troops – a commitment only accepted by the government and the Chiefs of Staff with serious misgivings. Then, of course, there was the problem of what to do next. Was the government to accept the expense of stationing such a force permanently in Palestine, or was there to be at least a partial withdrawal, despite the risk of further unrest? In 1936 the government opted for withdrawal; less than a year later the rebellion was renewed. It was not ultimately suppressed by 'boots on the ground' but by combined ground, air and maritime operations; and, along with the stick, came the carrot of the 1939 White Paper, soon followed by the diversion of the Second World War.



A Hawker Hardy of 6 Squadron over Haifa in 1939.



Vickers Wellesleys of 14 Squadron, May 1938.



## **Conclusions**

The application of the air control concept in the Middle East between the World Wars represented a major gamble for the RAF. The prevailing wisdom in the early 1920s equated the likely outcome of colonial policing tasks directly to the number of troops deployed: more soldiers implied a greater likelihood of mission success. Trenchard's suggestion that there might be a viable alternative inevitably provoked great scepticism among Army officers, colonial administrators and at least some politicians. Failure could potentially have had dire consequences, perhaps even jeopardising the RAF's future as an independent service. But, in the event, Trenchard's strategy paid off. In the specific context of Somaliland, Iraq and Aden (as well as in other theatres like Transjordan) air control broadly fulfilled the immediate requirements of British imperial defence policy by maintaining frontier security and internal order at minimal cost.

By contrast, in Palestine, air control did not provide a viable way of preserving domestic security. Yet it would be very simplistic to argue that the collapse of internal order after 1929 resulted primarily from a misplaced confidence in air control – a point sufficiently obvious at the time for there to be no very strenuous arguments to the contrary. To prevent the rebellion of 1936, a far larger standing military presence would have been required than anything that British governments (and especially the Treasury) were prepared to contemplate under normal circumstances.

Today's renewed interest in the air control era is not difficult to explain, given the current military focus on counter-insurgency and other forms of irregular warfare. But if any meaningful lessons are to be drawn from the RAF's application of air control, it is important that the concept should be properly understood. The examples of Somaliland, Iraq and Aden are particularly useful in this respect. They illustrate, first and foremost, that air control was not merely another term for proscription bombing; nor was air power simply a blunt instrument – a 'sledgehammer to miss a fly'. In actual fact, the inherent characteristics of air power, such as flexibility, reach and speed of response, helped to overcome obstacles that would have appeared insuperable before the advent of military aviation, and aircraft had many different capabilities to offer, even in the course of a single mission.

In terms of effort expended, by far the most significant was reconnaissance. The

provision of offensive air power – whether in independent or joint operations – was likewise of fundamental importance, but it accounted for only a small proportion of the RAF's operational tasking in Iraq and Aden. Combined, these reconnaissance and offensive capabilities proved especially valuable in both the isolation and containment of hostile activity. Air presence and shows of force were frequently employed for their proven deterrent effect, and aircraft could fulfil a wide variety of transport and communications tasks, as well as providing valuable support to civil authorities. Air control also involved novel approaches to command and control, and wholly revolutionary departures in the exploitation of communications and intelligence, including HUMINT. Additionally, the RAF's role in inter-war Iraq extended to aviation advisory activity – an approach characterised as 'best practice' in a number of recent studies, but which resulted in some unexpected and wholly undesirable outcomes in this particular case.

Secondly, air control did not usually involve the launch of wholly independent air operations. But then the RAF rarely claimed that it did. In actual fact, the RAF War Manuals of the inter-war years allowed for air power to be employed in many different ways in support of colonial policing activity, and devoted more space to the use of air power in conjunction with the Army or the police than to independent air missions. Equally, RAF officers like Salmond acknowledged in open publications that aircraft – far from operating on their own – often worked in very close co-operation with ground forces. When they did operate independently, it was invariably against remote and inaccessible targets which might only have been reached by the Army with the very greatest difficulty – if at all. It was not a case of air power versus boots on the ground; it was a case of air power or nothing.

But for the most part aircraft did not replace ground troops. Rather, they allowed them to be employed far more economically than had previously been possible. The officers who held senior rank in the inter-war RAF were mostly former Army officers with some experience of operations in the colonies. They consequently possessed a unique understanding of the relative merits of air and land forces, and of how they could best complement each other, as well as the confidence and the moral authority to devise and implement joint campaign plans.

Beyond this, Iraq and Aden demonstrate that the term 'air control' did not

simply equate to the use of air power against insurgencies. Outside Kurdistan, the bulk of the RAF's operational experience in Iraq, including the actual release of weapons, was concerned with the defence of frontiers rather than with the maintenance of internal security. Only within Kurdistan was the RAF engaged in a task which would today be recognised as counter-insurgency. But the RAF's approach to the problem of Kurdistan was shaped less by air control doctrine than by the particular nature of the insurgency there, and the simultaneous deployment of ground troops in considerable numbers illustrates the fact that the use of force would have been required under any circumstances – whether Iraq was subject to air control or to more conventional colonial policing techniques. In the absence of a political settlement, there was simply no alternative. In Aden, the frontier security task was no less important, and the RAF was rarely required to mount offensive operations to suppress internal dissidence.

However, if Iraq and Aden were success stories, Palestine confronted the British government with a variety of acute security problems between the wars; there were no simple solutions. As ever, inter-service arguments and the search for economies played a major role in framing policy. But British military postures in the region also reflected flawed assumptions about the more general security situation across the mandate, and about the capacity of the authorities in Palestine to build an effective civil security apparatus. The further assumption – that troops could be deployed to Palestine from Egypt – was more valid, but did not provide for a sufficiently rapid response to the disturbances of 1929. After 1929, British dispositions were duly revised; but the mere presence of troops or aircraft, whether in Palestine itself or Egypt, was never likely to prevent further unrest unless they were to be employed aggressively at the first sign of more trouble. This was the course of action so strongly promoted by Peirse in the spring of 1936, on the basis that the insurgency would otherwise spread throughout the Arab population. In his view, the only alternative was to announce sweeping political concessions, including drastic curbs on Jewish immigration.

Events were to vindicate his stance in the majority of respects; indeed, his views on security – which reflected the position of the Chiefs of Staff – were fully endorsed by the report of the Peel Commission in the following year.<sup>157</sup> In the absence of either a firm security policy or of meaningful political concessions,

the rebellion was destined to spiral out of control. It was only brought to an end following the deployment, partial withdrawal and then re-deployment of two Army divisions and augmented air (and naval) support, the introduction of repressive legal measures and, finally, the announcement of an (ostensibly) effective political compromise.

It was never at any stage in the inter-war period expected that air control measures would be employed to quell unrest in Palestine's larger urban centres. However, on more than one occasion between 1929 and 1938, senior RAF officers recommended the use of bombing on lines similar to those employed for policing purposes elsewhere in the British Empire. Yet, as this study has shown, they also proposed a wide range of other responses to the Arab insurgency; it would be grossly inaccurate to suggest that bombing was their sole solution. Peirse consistently (and largely unsuccessfully) advocated the use of enhanced security measures to *deter* insurgent activity. His proposal for employing air control techniques represented only one part of this approach, and was tabled at a time when Palestine appeared on the verge of complete anarchy, and when no political settlement seemed attainable. He could see no obvious alternative unless the government was prepared to deploy ground troops on a vastly increased scale. Harris similarly recommended the use of bombing in Palestine to make up for the sudden withdrawal of ground troops in September 1938, in the expectation that they were unlikely to return if war broke out in Europe, and at a time when no political resolution to the rebellion could have been predicted.

In the event, there was to be no recourse to air control measures even in rural parts of Palestine, and it is naturally quite possible that they would not have worked. But air power was central to the British security effort both in 1929 and in the late 1930s, nonetheless, and the manner in which it was exploited fully accorded with RAF doctrine.<sup>158</sup> It is also worth noting that the release of air ordnance – bombs included – was a very common occurrence in Palestine despite the rejection of air control, largely in response to Army fire support requests.

Otherwise, as in Iraq and Aden, aircraft fulfilled a wide variety of roles, once again reducing the burden on ground forces by (for example) patrolling over more remote areas and providing convoy escorts and cordons that would

otherwise have generated particularly onerous manpower demands. For all of these reasons, successive land commanders heaped praise upon the RAF for their contribution and fully accepted that air power had played a crucial part in countering the Arab insurgency. As Dill put it, 'local conditions of ground and policy combined to make it an especially effective weapon in Palestine.'<sup>159</sup>

Polemical accusations to the effect that one form of military action or another succeeded or failed in Palestine merely tend to obscure the more enduring lessons of the insurgency. As always, intelligence emerged as a vital factor, largely absent in 1929 and still inadequate in 1936, but three other issues are also of particular importance. First, while a number of recent studies have stressed the extreme importance of responding in a rapid and determined manner to the first signs of insurgent activity, the British experience in Palestine illustrates just how difficult it can be to translate this eminently sensible theory into practice. Yet failure in this respect allowed the revolts to spread, and left the insurgents holding the initiative in 1936. It was only recovered in 1939 because of political concessions that went far beyond anything British governments would publicly have countenanced in earlier years.

Second, there is the associated but somewhat broader issue of civil-military relations, and the task of co-ordinating action across the full range of civil and military authorities. Modern doctrine lays great emphasis on the importance of such co-ordination, echoing the pronouncements of inter-war RAF War Manuals, which stressed the necessity for 'the most intimate co-operation between the Air Force Commander and the political authority'. This required an unusually high level of political awareness and sensitivity on the part of senior officers.<sup>160</sup>

In Palestine, there was a clear gulf between the civil and military authorities on a range of security issues during the 1920s, and such improvements as took place in the following decade (for example through the internal security scheme), were well intentioned but inadequate, given the dramatic upsurge in Jewish immigration permitted by the civil power over the same period. Civil and military policy was not properly aligned until after Wauchope's retirement in 1938. In September, the police force was placed under the operational control of the General Officer Commanding British forces in Palestine, and military commanders were appointed in the various districts on 18 October to assume the powers and duties hitherto vested in civilian district commissioners (who

were subsequently to act as political advisers). This was nearly two and a half years after such a measure was first proposed by Air Vice-Marshal Peirse.<sup>161</sup>

Finally, while the employment of air power tended to be highly reactive, and the operational environment rarely provided much scope for detailed tactical plans, the potential value of air power's contribution made essential the formulation of broad concepts governing the means by which it could be exploited most profitably. Hence, there was a very clear basis for the argument that it should feature prominently at every stage in the *operational* planning process. Air control ensured that this was always the case but, for much of the inter-war period, the RAF doubted whether its considerable range of colonial policing capabilities would be optimally employed under any other command and control arrangements. Their stance was not unreasonable given the General Staff's immediate and forthright rejection of Trenchard's original air control concept, the prevailing lack of air expertise within the British Army in this period, and experience gained on India's North-west Frontier, where air control was not adopted.<sup>162</sup> It was in Palestine that a workable compromise was found in the form of genuinely combined headquarters arrangements, through which the RAF would ultimately concede overall command to the Army, confident that air power would be effectively integrated into future security policy and plans.

## **ANNEX A: Principal Air Power Lessons**

The key air power lessons and recurring themes to emerge from this study should by this time be very clear, but they are nevertheless summarised below.

### **Reconnaissance**

By a very substantial margin, the RAF's primary air control task in the Middle East between the wars was reconnaissance – armed, visual and photographic. Although no precise comparisons of flying effort were ever undertaken, reconnaissance missions clearly exceeded the totality of all other operational activity.

### **Morale effect**

Air power achieved far more through morale effect and deterrence than through kinetic effect. There was of course a role for kinetic effect, but the effort involved in finding and killing irregular adversaries was often disproportionate in relation to both immediate results and longer-term consequences.

### **Force multiplier**

Air power functioned as a force multiplier by providing a means to achieve extensive economies in the use of ground troops.

### **Tactical-level agility and flexibility**

Aircraft performed many different tasks and often fulfilled more than one role during the course of a single mission.

### **Air-land integration**

Although there was some scope for the employment of independent air power, most operations involved co-operation between air and ground forces, whether troops or police. Close integration from the very beginning of the planning process through to the execution of the operation frequently provided the key to mission success.

### **High-technology versus low-technology**

The small wars of the inter-war years were not accompanied by air-to-air threats or more than limited ground-to-air threats, but this did not necessarily make high technology irrelevant to their prosecution. Needless to say, the most advanced technology of the air control era appears primitive from a 21<sup>st</sup>

century standpoint.

### **Environment and terrain**

The utility of air power in close country or in urban environments proved extremely limited.

### **Insurgents and other irregulars adjust and adapt quickly**

Over time, at least some of the RAF's adversaries became less susceptible to air control methods, and developed tactics designed to reduce their vulnerability to air attack.

### **Doctrine**

In the inter-war years the RAF rapidly translated the experiences and lessons of air control and broader colonial policing operations into written doctrine, which was set down in a dedicated chapter of the RAF's War Manual and in a variety of other publications. At least some form of updated doctrine appeared almost annually throughout the period.

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## **ANNEX B: General Lessons**

The following more general lessons also recurred throughout.

### **Leadership**

Quite apart from any other qualities generally associated with military leadership, it was essential for senior officers engaged in counter-insurgency and other types of irregular warfare to demonstrate a high degree of political awareness.

### **Intelligence**

Accurate and timely intelligence was critically important to the successful prosecution of small wars. 'Know your enemy' was perhaps the most fundamental principle of all.

### **Civil-military collaboration**

Military action could only ever represent part of any campaign against insurgents and irregulars; civil authorities also had a vital role to play, and it was essential for civil and military action to be closely co-ordinated.



### **Prompt action**

Rapid countermeasures were essential to prevent insurgencies from spreading and gaining momentum. Hesitation, inaction or a failure to recognise the early stages of an insurgency could massively increase the time, effort and cost of its ultimate suppression.

### **Isolation and containment**

The potential for defeating insurgents and other dissident elements was greatly increased when they were isolated and cut off from external sources of support or recruitment.

### **Host-nation legitimacy**

Wherever possible it was better for host nations to provide for their own security than for the colonial power to do so. However, the benefits to be secured thereby had to be weighed against any potential disadvantages, most notably the implied delegation of military authority to the host nation.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> AHB spent much of the inter-war years working on the history of the Royal Flying Corps and the RAF in the First World War; the branch was then disestablished in the later 1930s, before being re-established to record the RAF's role in the Second World War. Subsequent work on small wars and counter-insurgency activity focused on the era of British decolonisation, from 1945 through to 1975.

<sup>2</sup> The most regularly cited history of the RAF in the air control era is David Omissi's *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1990). However, this was primarily an academic study by an author with a research focus on imperialism rather than air power. In more recent years, the most influential work in this field has been James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson's *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Kansas University Press, 2003). Unfortunately their coverage of the air control era (written from an obviously sceptical perspective and drawing heavily on Omissi) is flawed in a variety of respects. Some of these are considered below in more detail but the most noteworthy is their failure to consult a single official RAF doctrinal publication from the inter-war period, despite their frequent

references to 'the RAF's doctrine of air control'. A more balanced but less well-known study is Bruce Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict, 1919-1976* (Rand, Santa Monica, 1989). All of these histories provide a misleading picture of air control by focusing too narrowly on the offensive and kinetic application of air power.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard* (Collins, London, 1962), pp. 366-369; Staff College, Quetta, 1928, Summary of Information, RAF Operations in Somaliland in 1920; untitled official narrative of operations in Somaliland in 1920 (AHB copy).

<sup>4</sup> Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 8 November 1920, pp. 10829.

<sup>5</sup> Some argued that the RAF attacked Medishi and Jid Ali prematurely, scattering the insurgents before the ground forces were in position, and making their task more difficult. On the other hand, forts such as Baran, which did not come under air attack, offered very much more determined resistance than Medishi or Jid Ali, which were abandoned soon after being bombed.

<sup>6</sup> Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 8 November 1920, pp. 10832.

<sup>7</sup> Staff College, Quetta, 1928, Summary of Information, RAF Operations in Somaliland in 1920; untitled official narrative of operations in Somaliland in 1920; Randal Gray, 'Bombing the "Mad Mullah" – 1920', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 125, No.4, December 1980, pp. 41-47.

<sup>8</sup> CD 81, Air Staff memorandum No. 48, Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power, Appendix I (AHB copy).

<sup>9</sup> RAF Air Publication 1300, Royal Air Force War Manual Part 1: Operations (unpublished doctrine manual, Air Ministry, 1928), Chapter 14 (AHB copy).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 46, Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries, Air Staff, 24 March 1930.

<sup>12</sup> RAF Air Publication 1300 (1928), Chapter 14.

<sup>13</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 46, Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries, Air Staff, 24 March 1930.

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on Salmond's report in the *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 10 June 1924.

<sup>15</sup> CD 92, Report on the Operations in Southern Kurdistan against Shaikh Mahmud, October 1930-May 1931, Air Ministry, April 1932 (AHB copy). This report contains a useful biographical note on Mahmud by one Captain V. Holt, the Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner of Iraq.

<sup>16</sup> CD 59, Report on the Operations Carried Out in the Southern Desert in connection with the Iraq-Najd Borders, November 1927 – May 1928 (AHB copy).

<sup>17</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, pp. 509-510.

<sup>18</sup> Air Publication 1105, Iraq Command Report, October 1922-April 1924 (AHB copy).

<sup>19</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 382.

<sup>20</sup> Air Publication 1105, paragraph 176.

<sup>21</sup> For the correspondence between Trenchard and Salmond on this point, see Boyle, *Trenchard*, pp. 508-510.

<sup>22</sup> Air Publication 1105, paragraph 221.

<sup>23</sup> CD 81, Appendix II.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 15. There was one such operation in 1927 and one in 1928; there were none in 1929.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix I.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 17.

<sup>27</sup> Air Staff Memorandum No. 52, 255005/33, Air Control: A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College, April 1933, pp. 10-12 (AHB copy).

<sup>28</sup> Air Publication 1300 (1940), Chapter 13, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Role of Special Service Officers in the Air Intelligence Organisation', *RAF Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 1, Jan 1931, pp. 51-58.

<sup>30</sup> Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections* (Cassell, London, 1956), p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> CD 59, Appendix 14.

<sup>32</sup> W. Green and John Fricker, *The Air Forces of the World: Their History, Development and Present Strength* (Macdonald, London, 1958), pp. 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> C.G. Grey and Leonard Bridgman (eds.), *Jane's All the World's Aircraft* (Sampson Low, London, 1939), p. 27b.

<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History* (Routledge, London, 2009), p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Grey and Bridgman (eds.), *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, p. 27b; Air Historical Branch Narrative, *The Middle East Campaigns, Vol. VIII, Operations in Iraq, May 1941*, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> James S. Corum, 'Airpower Roles and Missions in Counterinsurgency', in J Fergusson and William March (eds.), *No Clear Flight Plan: Counterinsurgency and Aerospace Power* (Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 2008), p. 213; see also Alan J. Vick, Adam Grissom, William Rosenau, Beth Grill, Karl P. Mueller, *Air Power in the New Counter-Insurgency Era: The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions* (RAND, Santa

Monica, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> CD 92, paragraphs 11, 22, 26, 70, 71.

<sup>38</sup> CD 110, Iraq Command Report, December 1932-December 1934, Air Ministry, July 1935, paragraphs 26-32 (AHB copy).

<sup>39</sup> Air Historical Branch Narrative, *The Middle East Campaigns, Vol. VIII, Operations in Iraq, May 1941*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> Squadron Leader R.A. Cochrane, 'The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden', *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, February 1931, pp. 88-91; CD 81, pp. 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> TNA AIR 10/2194, CD 58, Report on Operations Against the Zeidi Imam, 25 June-25 August, 1928, issued by the Air Ministry, November 1928, pp. 16-17; on air reconnaissance tasking in this period, see TNA AIR 27/112, 8 Squadron F.540, 1927-1929.

<sup>42</sup> TNA AIR 10/2194, CD 58, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Cochrane, *The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95; TNA AIR 10/2194, CD 58, pp. 9-13.

<sup>45</sup> TNA AIR 27/113, 8 Squadron F.540, entry of 20 October 1933; Air Historical Branch file, 'Aden', chronology of operations in 1933.

<sup>46</sup> CD 109, Report on the operations carried out from Aden against the Quteibi tribe from the 22nd March to the 21st May 1934, issued by the Air Ministry, February 1935, p. 3 (AHB copy).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5; Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, February 1937, p. 351.

<sup>48</sup> Cochrane, 'The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden', p. 96.

<sup>49</sup> Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>50</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 509.

<sup>51</sup> This conclusion is based on a survey of TNA AIR 27/112 and AIR 27/113, 8 Squadron F.540s, 1927-1938, and on the chronology of RAF operations in Aden in the 1930s held in Air Historical Branch file 'Aden'.

<sup>52</sup> H.A. Taylor, *Fairey Aircraft since 1915* (Putnam, London, 1984), p. 145. The Vincents could carry 1,000lb of bombs.

<sup>53</sup> CD 109, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> John Shipman, 'Aubrey Rickards: Winged Pioneer', *British-Yemeni Society Journal*, July 2002, <http://www.al-bab.com/bys/articles/rickards02.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> Cochrane, 'The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden', p. 97.

<sup>56</sup> Bound volume entitled *Air Power Notes Inter War; Aden, Iraq, Malta, Middle East, Palestine, India, Far East* (AHB copy).

<sup>57</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', pp. 344-347.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 355.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 352-355.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 356-357. For details of medical treatment provided to the indigenous population, of the conveyance of army, naval and political officers, and of assistance provided by the RAF to civil authorities, see *Air Power Notes Inter War*, Aden section.

<sup>62</sup> David Omissi, 'Technology and Repression: Air Control in Palestine, 1922-36', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1990), p. 58.

<sup>63</sup> J. Corum, 'Air Control: Reassessing the History', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Summer 2001, pp. 28-29.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Furse, *Wilfrid Freeman: The Genius Behind Allied Survival and Air Supremacy, 1939-1945* (Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2000), p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur T. Harris, *Despatch on War Operations, 23 February 1942 to 8 May 1945* (Frank Cass, London, 1995), introduction by Sebastian Cox, p. xi.

<sup>66</sup> TNA AIR 23/765, Harris to Air Vice-Marshal Nichol (AOC RAF Middle East), 5 September 1938.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times* (Greenhill, London, 2001), pp. 81-84.

<sup>68</sup> RAF Air Publication 1300 (1928), Chapter 14.

<sup>69</sup> RAF Air Publication 1300 (1940), Chapter 13.

<sup>70</sup> <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf>, CMD 5479, Peel Commission Report, July 1937, Chapter 7, paragraph 7.

<sup>71</sup> Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 24/131, note by Secretary of State for the Colonies (CP 3515), November 1921.

<sup>73</sup> TNA WO 32/5840, CIGS to S of S, 10 December 1921.

<sup>74</sup> Slessor, *The Central Blue*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>75</sup> When the disturbances broke out, both 14 Squadron and 2 Armoured Car Company were based at Amman; see Report on the Palestine Riots, 23 August 1929 to 11th September 1929, Air Ministry, March 1930, p. 3 (AHB copy).

<sup>76</sup> Sir Patrick Playfair and John Jarvis, *'Pip' Playfair: A Founding Father of the RAF* (Stockwell, Devon, 1979), p. 73.

<sup>77</sup> Peel Commission Report, Chapter 7, paragraph 8.

<sup>78</sup> Vincent Orange, *Dowding of Fighter Command: Victor of the Battle of Britain*

(Grub Street, London, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> *Air Force List*. According to this source, the status of Air Officer Commanding was not applied to the RAF commander in Transjordan and Palestine until 1933.

<sup>80</sup> Report on the Palestine Riots, 23 August 1929 to 11th September 1929, p. 3, Appendix 'E'.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *British Air Power in Peripheral Conflict*, p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Report on the Palestine Riots, 23 August 1929 to 11th September 1929, p. 83.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 46-47.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>95</sup> Autobiographical notes on Dowding (AHB copy), p. 137.

<sup>96</sup> Orange, *Dowding*, pp. 46-50; autobiographical notes on Dowding, pp. 137-139; Peel Commission Report, Chapter 7, paragraph 16.

<sup>97</sup> Peel Commission Report, Chapter 7, paragraphs 14, 15, 31, 33, 37 and 38.

<sup>98</sup> Orange, *Dowding of Fighter Command*, p. 50.

<sup>99</sup> [http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story\\_831.html](http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story_831.html), A Survey of Palestine, prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 by the British Mandate for the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, p. 185.

<sup>100</sup> *Air Power Notes Inter War*, Palestine section; TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540, April 1936.

<sup>101</sup> AHB file on Palestine, monthly summary of RAF activity in Palestine and Transjordan, 1935.

<sup>102</sup> *Air Force List*.

<sup>103</sup> AP 1926, Abridged Despatch by Air Vice-Marshal R.E.C. Peirse on Disturbances in Palestine, 19th April to 14th September 1936, p. 31.

<sup>104</sup> TNA CAB 24/209, report by COS (COS 214), 20 December 1929.

<sup>105</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 46, Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries, Air Staff, 24 March 1930.

- <sup>106</sup> AP 1926, p. 31.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 20, 23, 28.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>113</sup> TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540, May 1936.
- <sup>114</sup> TNA AIR 27/80, Diary, No 6 (Bomber) Squadron, 25 June 1936.
- <sup>115</sup> AP 1926, Appendix 3; TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540, June 1936.
- <sup>116</sup> AP 1926, p. 25.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 33, 35, 38, 46-47.
- <sup>118</sup> AP 1926, pp. 32-33, 62. In 1937, the Peel Commission noted that in 1936 there were 260 reported cases of murder, 67 convictions and no death sentences. See Peel Commission Report, Chapter 7, paragraph 15.
- <sup>119</sup> AP 1926, pp. 33-35.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36; Appendix 3.
- <sup>121</sup> *Air Power Notes Inter War*, Palestine section, messages of appreciation, GOC Palestine to US of S, War Office, 25 February 1938.
- <sup>122</sup> John Yoxall, 'No 6 Squadron RAF, History of a Famous Army Co-operation Unit, Part 1: From 1914 to 1949', *Flight*, 28 December 1950, p. 623; AP 1926, p. 60.
- <sup>123</sup> AP 1926, pp. 36-37, 40-41.
- <sup>124</sup> TNA WO 191/75, Preliminary Notes on the Lessons of the Palestine Rebellion, February 1937.
- <sup>125</sup> AP 1926, pp. 37, 38, 40, 41.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 43, 44, 47.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-46.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-57.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- <sup>131</sup> See, for example, TNA CAB 23/85, CC 56 (36), p. 22, which refers to 'bombing of the civil population' – a course of action which had not in fact been proposed.
- <sup>132</sup> TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540, September 1936.
- <sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>134</sup> AP 1926, pp. 57-59; TNA CAB 24/263, memorandum by Peirse, 20 August 1936.
- <sup>135</sup> AP 1926, p. 59.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62. This assertion is corroborated by TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540,

September 1936, which notes a marked reduction in the number of XX calls during September. In fact, the squadron took part in only two actions involving the release of ordnance between 12 and 30 September inclusive.

<sup>137</sup> Peel Commission Report, Chapter 4, paragraphs 15-18.

<sup>138</sup> AP 1926, Appendices 6 and 6A.

<sup>139</sup> TNA WO 191/75, Preliminary Notes on the Lessons of the Palestine Rebellion, February 1937, p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> TNA WO 191/70, Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936, February 1938, p. 104.

<sup>141</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf>, reports by the British government to the League of Nations for the years 1937 and 1938; TNA AIR 27/73, 6 Squadron F.540, November 1937.

<sup>142</sup> [http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story\\_831.html](http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story_831.html), A Survey of Palestine, p. 45.

<sup>143</sup> TNA AIR 23/765, Harris to Air Vice-Marshal Nichol, 5 September 1938.

<sup>144</sup> <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf>, CMD 6019, Palestine Statement of Policy, presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament, May 1939.

<sup>145</sup> Resumés of Operations, Months of September and November 1939, Headquarters RAF Palestine and Transjordan (AHB copy).

<sup>146</sup> TNA AIR 23/765, Harris to Nichol, 15 September 1938.

<sup>147</sup> Resumé of Operations, Month of March 1940, Headquarters RAF Palestine and Transjordan (AHB copy).

<sup>148</sup> AP 1300 (1940), Chapter 13, paragraphs 57-59.

<sup>149</sup> TNA AIR 27/365, 33 Squadron F.540, November 1938.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Resumé of Operations, Month of August 1939, Headquarters RAF Palestine and Transjordan (AHB copy).

<sup>152</sup> Resumé of Operations, Month of November 1939, Headquarters RAF Palestine and Transjordan (AHB copy).

<sup>153</sup> TNA WO 191/88, History of Disturbances in Palestine, 1936-1939, p. 11.

<sup>154</sup> *Air Power Notes Inter War*, Palestine section, summary of operational casualties, 1938.

<sup>155</sup> 50th anniversary history of 6 Squadron, prepared by the RAF in 1963, p. 28 (AHB copy).

<sup>156</sup> M. Hughes, 'The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39', *English Historical Review*, Vol. CXXIV, No. 507, pp. 314-354; <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf>, report by the British



government to the League of Nations for the year 1938.

<sup>157</sup> Peel Commission Report, Chapter 7, paragraph 57. 'Should disorder break out again of such a nature as to require the intervention of the Military, there should be no hesitation in enforcing martial law throughout the country under undivided military control.'

<sup>158</sup> AP 1300 (1928), Chapter 14, paragraphs 37-50; AP 1300 (1940), Chapter 13, paragraphs 38-59.

<sup>159</sup> TNA WO 191/70, Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936, February 1938, p. 104.

<sup>160</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 46, Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries, Air Staff, 24 March 1930.

<sup>161</sup> [http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story 831.html](http://palestineremembered.com/Acre/Books/Story_831.html), A Survey of Palestine, pp. 45-46.

<sup>162</sup> CD 81, p. 19. 'The air forces available were usually wrongly employed; insufficient aircraft were directed to attack too extensive an area; air attacks were carried out spasmodically when there were aircraft available after requirements of co-operation with the column had been met. Moreover, financial stringency in India had affected the supply of technical stores for these air units ...'

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