

Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

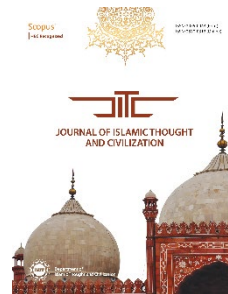
Volume 14 Issue 2, Fall 2024

ISSN(P): 2075-0943 ISSN(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



Article QR



Title: The Dhofar Revolution: An Archival Analysis of the Conflict (1965-1976)

Author (s): Saif Al Bedwawi

Affiliation (s): University of Sharjah, UAE


DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.142.02>

History: Received: July 18, 2024, Revised: October 30, 2024, Accepted: November 05, 2024,

Published: December 24, 2024

Citation: Al Bedwawi, Saif. "The Dhofar Revolution: An Archival Analysis of the Conflict (1965-1976)." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (2024): 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.142.02>

Copyright: © The Authors

Licensing:  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Conflict of Interest: Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

The Dhofar Revolution: An Archival Analysis of the Conflict (1965-1976)

Saif Al Bedwawi*

Visiting Academic at College of Arts
Humanities, and Social Sciences
The University of Sharjah
United Arab Emirates

Abstract

Britain's military presence in the Middle East underwent a significant transformation by the 1960s, characterized by contractions to establish smaller bases in Aden and the Gulf; however, the British military marked a significant change in contrast to its former stronghold at the Suez base. These bases protected vital oil interests and fulfilled Britain's obligations to local rulers. However, political developments within the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula increasingly challenged Britain's strategic position. These evolving dynamics necessitated a re-evaluation of both diplomatic and military strategies leading to the most far-reaching anti-British revolution, the Dhofar Revolution in Oman. The scholarly discourses concerning the end of the revolution have highlighted the reintegration of the *Dhofar* society that was actively engaged in the revolutionary struggles of broader Omni society. Nevertheless, the mechanisms employed for their success/failures have not been covered in the existing literature. Consequently, this paper aims to fill this existing gap in the literature by contextually analysing the present literature and archival documents on the *Dhofar* war. For this purpose, the authors extensively utilized archival documents available within the Arabian Gulf Digital Archive (AGDA) in Abu Dhabi. Moreover, the *Dhofari* rebel literature derived from *The Gulf Bulletin* fervently promoted the communist revolutionary ideology. On the other hand, the Omani government's viewpoint was extensively disseminated through its military propaganda branch, aiming to counter the rebels' influence. This paper posits that, despite the strong support from the Communist bloc, the *Dhofari* Revolution ultimately failed because the rebels made hastened attempts to replace the region's traditional cultural values and Islamic beliefs with their novel ideological vision. This alienated the *Dhofari* population, causing the rebels to lose the support of the people they aspired to lead.

Keywords: communist ideology, Dhofar war, military propaganda, Middle East geopolitics, rebel literature

Introduction

British military command in 1967 was relocated from Aden to Bahrain and was renamed *British Forces Gulf Command*, which included associated bases in *Sharjah* and on *Masirah* island in Oman. The British presence in Oman was fuelled by myriads of external factors, especially after World War II British interests in Oman and the Gulf became concentrated on critical strategic points. On one hand, Oman was regarded as a crucial strategic base for the *British Royal Air Force*, due to its location between Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. On the other hand, its significance was amplified by the presence of oil fields both in the Gulf and within Oman itself. Simultaneously, Oman entered its control over the strategically vital Straits of Hormuz, through which all the tanks were mandated to transverse. This ultimately helped Britain to consider Oman significantly developed to cultivate a close friendship with Oman's *Sultan Sa'id bin Taymour*. Therefore, when the Sultan needed assistance in his difficulties, Britain responded quickly to the Sultan in the 1950s. Additionally, the Sultan's authority faced its most significant threats from the *Imamate* uprising in 1957-1959.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Saif Albedwawi, Visiting Academic at College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, The University of Sharjah, UAE saif4933@hotmail.com

Secondly, the Dhofar Rebellion Revolution was more sophisticated ideologically and in the military field. The Dhofar revolution started in 1965 and persisted until 1977 when it faced suppression.

1.1. Significance of the Study

This study delves into the underlying causes of the Dhofar Revolution and its failures, despite the apparent military successes and the support of foreign troops siding with it. The research argues that the Revolution's critical misstep was its attempt to challenge and disrupt the entrenched traditional way of life in Dhofar. By promoting socialist ideologies, the rebels sought to shift the Dhofaris away from their Islamic values and customs, creating a deep disconnection between the revolutionary leadership and the local population. This ideological shift is examined as a key factor that contributed to the eventual collapse of the movement.

1.2. Research Methodology

This paper primarily utilizes an array of primary sources, including all the available documents in the Arabian Gulf Archive in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, memos from former officers who were involved in the conflict provide valuable insights into the tactical aspects of the war. Omani sources, particularly those relying on the oral histories of former rebels, also serve as significant discourse, offering unique perspectives on the events and motivations behind the *Dhofar* revolution.

2. Dhofar at War

Dhofar, the Southern province of Oman, is distinct from the rest of the country in its tropical climate; in its language (related to the ancient languages of South Arabia), and in its *Shafi-Sunni* Islam as opposed to the non-*Sunni Ibadi*¹ inhabitants of the Sultanate. The *Dhofar* province is also distinguished in its mountainous character in that the altitude rises to as high as 4,500 feet; and, located on the border with Yemen (formerly The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), by its distance from Muscat, the capital of Oman.²

It was the *Imamate*³ rebellion that had encouraged the tribal leaders of *Dhofar* province to try to set up their separate state and escape from the harsh rule of *Sultan Sa'id* of Muscat. As the British Council-General once wrote about it to the Political Resident: "The Sultan has for too long had too many repressive measures, e.g., a man has not been able to buy a radio or a bicycle without permission; he has not been able to build a house and much more."⁴

These policies prompted people to join the cause of the young Dhofaris, who had encountered Arab nationalists while working in the Gulf.⁵ These young *Dhofaris* were encouraged by the success

¹The *Ibadi* school of thought was part of *Kharijism* that was developed in the early history of Islam. It emphasized the rule by an Imam who was elected by the community. See: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, vol. 3, eds. B. Lewis et.al (London: Luzaca Co., 1968), 648-660.

²J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy* (New York: Baster and Bols, 1986).

³The *Imamate* War was called the Green Mountain War, that started in 1957 and was not defeated until 1959 by a combination of British, Trucial Oman Scouts, and the Sultan's forces. See: George Rentz, "The Imamate of Oman," *A Report*, FO 1016/3131954.

⁴FO 371/185365, 1966, *Omani Rebel Activity*, British Consulate General (1013), Muscat. Phillips, Esq., C.G., British Residency, Bahrain, <https://www.agda.ae/index.php/en/catalogue/tna/fo/371/148908>

⁵"Ta'likan Siyasiyyan li-l-Jabhah al-Sha'biyyah li-Tahrir 'Oman wa-l-Khalij al-Arabi," (Two Political Reports by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf), *Dirasat 'Arabiyyah*, vol. 9, no. 4, (February 1973): 112.

of the Yemen Revolution in 1962. By 1964, the tribal leaders⁶ and the *Dhofari* branch of the Arab nationalists had consolidated themselves into a front forming an alliance called the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF). However, the DLF did not become active until 9 June 1965, when its first declaration was made.⁷ The central concern of this paper is the spread of the Dhofar Revolution within the region and the underlying factors that contributed to its failure in 1977.

3. From DLF to PFLOAG

By 1966, the Dhofar rebellion was creating considerable apprehension among the British authorities in the Gulf due to a range of compelling reasons. For instance, they perceived it as a threat to their interests in the Gulf and Oman. Moreover, this period was indicatively considered as a flourishing time for Britain, when Britain was trying to expand its military presence in the region after the experience of the Kuwait Operation in 1961.⁸ Until then, Britain had recognized the complexities involved in mobilizing forces from Britain; therefore, each Gulf ruler was encouraged to establish their own army and air force, by leveraging capital from oil revenue.⁹

This new policy had been accepted by Kuwait, which had already commenced to develop a *Kuwaiti Air Force* with the help of British advisers. In Oman, Sultan Sa'id initiated the expansion and development of his armed forces, albeit with some reservations, as he feared that rapid military expansion could jeopardize his regime. Additionally, he faced challenges in improving the living conditions within his country, as, despite the ongoing oil exploration, the *Sultan* had not yet received substantial oil revenues.¹⁰

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi, governed by *Sheikh Shakhbut*, was reluctant to develop its armed forces; however, in 1965 *Sheikh Shakhbut* approved the establishment of a small defence force under the command of Colonel Tug Wilson. Following the ousting of *Sheikh Shakhbut* in August 1966, these forces were significantly expanded and equipped with Hunter aircraft.¹¹

Moreover, Britain was compelled to retain a direct military presence in Oman, which underscored a necessity by leasing the Island of *Masirah* from Sultan *Sa'id* for ninety-nine years after the defeat of the Imamate forces in 1959. *Masirah* became a part of the British Military Command in Aden, but its significance increased only after the Kuwait operation of 1961. In 1962 a 9,000-foot asphalt runway was constructed on the island. The strategic position of the Island on account of its

⁶A well-known tribal leader with the name of *Musallam bin Nufl* from *Kathir* tribe of Dhofar had sparked the first attack on Omani troops as well as the RAF station in Salalah. *Musallam bin Nufl* had travelled many times to Saudi Arabia to get support from the former revolutionary leader of the Imamate war, *Talib bin Ali al-Hinai*. The late Imam took refuge in Saudi Arabia after the failure of his famous Green Mountain war in 1959. See, I. Buttenshaw, *Dhofar War, 1965-1975, A Chronology and Synopses of Major Operations* (Muscat: Royal Army of Oman Printing Press 2010).

⁷The Gulf Committee, *Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf*, 9th June Studies (London 1974).

⁸A few days after Kuwait got her independent from Britain, General Kasim of Iraq had moved his forces to Basra as pretext to invade Kuwait, the seriousness of Kasim threat was though questionable. See: J. Howarth, "An Appraisal of the Kuwait Operation of July 1961," (MSc Thesis, Wales University, Aberystwyth, 1973).

⁹Anthony Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 431-439.

¹⁰Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Police*. 56.

¹¹FO 371/179929, 1965, Abu Dhabi army, H. M. Political Agency, Abu Dhabi 27 March 1965, (Arabian Gulf Digital Archive, Abu Dhabi, visited on 31/03/2023).

isolation and offshore location caused it to outlive all the other British bases in the Gulf allowing the Royal Air Force (RAF) to utilize it for their withdrawal in 1980 after the defeat of the *Dhofar* rebellion.¹² Similarly, RAF Sharjah, established a station in the thirties that later subsequently expanded after the Kuwait operation in 1961 with a new 9,000-foot asphalt runway. This RAF base in Sharjah also received a further expansion in 1967, and was used by UAE military Air Force until it was closed in 1977.

However, between September 1 to 25, 1968, the DLF (Dhofar Liberation Front) convened its second conference since 1964, known as the *Himrin* conference.¹³ During this conference, a Marxist faction emerged, leading to the adoption of several key points:¹⁴

- (a) Changing the Front's name to the *Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf* (PFLOAG); thus, expanding their struggle against the British presence in other parts of the Gulf.
- (b) Adopting the Marxist-Leninist ideology.
- (c) Supporting the struggle of the Palestinians and other liberation movements in the world.

Accordingly, the *Dhofar* situation was intensifying, and Britain sought to avoid any further large-scale dissidence in Oman, such as, the *Imamate* unrest. It already had enough trouble with the nationalists in Aden.¹⁵ Despite the challenges, the guerrillas were achieving considerable success, as demonstrated by a series of well-planned and skilfully executed operations that outperformed those of the *Imamate*, resulting in the deaths of British officers and casualties among the Sultan's forces. There were also attempts on the *Sultan's* life, including one incident that took place in May 1966. This precarious situation created anxiety for the British authorities, as these activities gave indications that the unrest situation would persist for many years. Therefore, Britain accepted the *Sultan's* requests to activate the 1958 treaty, which stipulated that Britain would offer military assistance to the *Sultan*.¹⁶ Consequently, a few units of the army and RAF were rapidly deployed to Oman. British military forces in Oman promptly publicised their presence to the rebels and any potential supporters by military exercises, display of the flag, and firepower demonstrations.

To avert the threat of rebellion in Oman, Britain implemented several new measures. The first focused on the political and economic development. Although Oman was considered an independent State, however, it had maintained special treaty relations with Britain. Soon the Britishers realised that *Sultan Sa'id* was causing consternation for Britain because he was not eager to spend money on development and was ruling Oman like a police state. After 1967, when oil was found by Shell in commercial quantities, the Sultan began receiving substantial oil revenues but was still withholding the developmental funds. According to *H.M. Consul-General in Oman*, Mr. Carden (1965-1969), it became a major political problem when the Sultan had money but he refused to spend it for the betterment of his country:¹⁷

¹²IOR/R/15/6/90 'File 2/15 British Consulate Muscat Masirah and Salalah landing grounds.

¹³Himrin is a mountain in Salalah/Dhofar.

¹⁴J. E. Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy* (London: Saqi, 2007), 76-77.

¹⁵D.L. Price, "Oman: Insurgency and Development," *Conflict Studies* no. 53 (1975): 4.

¹⁶Exchange of Letters between the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman concerning the Sultan's Armed forces, civil Aviation, Royal Air Force facilities and Economic Development in Muscat and Oman, London July 25th 1958, Cmnd (507).

¹⁷FO 371/185365, 1966, Omani rebel activity, Letter from Bill Carden, British Consulate-General, Muscat, to H. Phillips, Esq., C. G., British Residency, Bahrain 28th March 1966.

Britain had an old alliance with Oman and with the *Sultan*. The Sultan presented Britain with a problem. He had inherited in the 1930s a bankrupt state that was left by his father who abdicated and lived in a hotel in Bombay in poverty. The Sultan always remembered this and he did not want to be bankrupt so he did not spend money which he did not have ... The oil was found by Shell and then his financial position was different, but he had been influenced by the last 30 years. He could not stop being afraid of spending money. It became a major political problem when he did not have money but did not spend it on the welfare of his people for schools, hospitals, roads etc. The problem for the British government was that we knew his people were getting restless, they wanted these necessities ... We tried to persuade him to be generous, but he used to say: 'I am an independent sovereign and you're British, mind your own business.'



Figure 1. *Sultan Sai'd bin Taimur with Shaikh Zayed and Shaikh Shakhbut in 1955*

Source: TOS Association

The British authorities tried to persuade *Sultan Sa'id* to change his approach; however, the Sultan refused to cooperate in utilizing the oil revenue for the economic development of his country. Nevertheless, the *Sultan Sa'id* did cooperate with the British regarding their strategic interests. Britain had an RAF station at *Salalah, Dhofar*, in addition to the RAF base on *Masirah* Island. Also, the British Navy was permitted unrestricted access to use the *Sultan's* ports any time, and a British oil company was responsible for developing the country's oil resources. Consequently, despite the embarrassment that Sultan Sa'id's harsh rule caused Britain, the country continued to offer him financial support, offering him an annual grant of £250,000 between 1959 and 1967, before the discovery of oil. The development programme, which involved building roads, establishing agricultural trial stations, and constructing several health dispensaries was headed by Sir Hugh Boustead.¹⁸ Boustead recalled that though he found *Sultan Sa'id* a pleasant man he was responsible for obstructing development in Oman. This problem became more pronounced when the country began to receive substantial oil revenues after 1967.

In light of *Sultan's* reluctance to implement economic development in Oman, which was initiated by the British authorities as a measure to help the rebellion of *Dhofar*. The British officials recognized the need for political change in region. They tried to obtain concessions from the *Sultan*

¹⁸Hugh Boustead, *The Wind of Morning* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 219.

but their attempts to persuade him to alter his policies or to step down in favour of his son met with failure. Nevertheless, in July 1970, *Sultan Sa'id* abdicated in favour of his son, *Sultan Qaboos*. Officially, Britain considered this as an internal affair; but there was strong evidence that the British were closely involved in the coup.¹⁹

Another measure implemented by Britain to mitigate threat of the *Dhofar* rebellion was a series of military operations in the *Dhofar* province beginning in 1965. To support the military operations in Oman, the number of troops were increased, and military units were transferred from Cyprus to Bahrain and Sharjah.²⁰ Initially, Canberra B16 aircrafts were transferred from the squadron in Cyprus to the RAF base in *Sharjah*. Additionally, RAF planes were dispatched to *Masirah* along with a parachute regiment since the base was already developed. In 1965-67, the RAF base at *Masirah* was completely rebuilt for £3 million resulting in the establishment of a new fuel storage installation, water distillation plant, and a communication centre.²¹ Additionally, the British Government sent the destroyer *H.M.S Fearless*, to the *Dhofar* border with South Yemen to launch an operation in the *Hauf* area. This was undertaken by elements of the 1st Irish Guards.²² However, Britain could not sustain this operation in Oman due to extensive defence budget cuts and commitments such as to NATO. At the same time the British public, press and parliament were uneasy about these operations.²³ Therefore, Britain encouraged the *Sultan* to seek help from other countries like Jordan and Iran. Furthermore, it encouraged British soldiers to seek personal contracts in the *Sultan's* forces. As a result of this policy, more than 1,500 British officers and soldiers arrived in Oman to assist the *Sultan's* forces, remaining until their withdrawal on March 31, 1977, following the defeat of the rebellion.²⁴



Figure 2. *Sultan Qaboos* Rallying Support from the Neighbouring Countries During his Visit to the UAE in 1973

¹⁹Colonel Tony Jeapes, *SAS: Operation Oman* (London: William Kimber, 1980), 27.

²⁰Bell J. Bowyer, "South Arabia: Violence and Revolt," *Conflict Studies* (November 1973): 6-7.

²¹*Ibid.*, 260.

²²*Ibid.*, 267.

²³*The Reality and Expectations of Oman's Revolution, Special Series* no. 8, (1978): 32. University of Basra, Arab Gulf Studies Centre publications,

²⁴"Statement on Defence Estimate, 1977," London H.M.S.O, 1977, Para. 226. Cmnd. 6735; Also see: Penelope Tremayne, "End of a Ten-Year War," *Royal United Services Institute Journal for Defence Studies*, vol. cxxii, (March 1977): 44.

4. Iran's Strategic Involvement in Building Regional Alliance for Political Leverage

In October 1971, during the Shah of Iran celebrations at Persepolis, initial dialogue between the two governments began and given the Shah's fervent anti-communist stance and his regional role as the policeman of the Gulf, Iranian support for *Sultan Qaboos's* efforts against *Dhofar* Guerrilla warfare was assured.

The Iranian support group arrived in *Salah* on December 16th, 1973, and immediately began establishing their base in the *Thumrit* area in Dhofar. The Iranian battle group consisted of the following: a parachute battalion of three companies, one battery of 120mm mortars, one platoon of 106mm, along with Iranian Special Forces. Furthermore, an Iranian air defence unit consisting of anti-air crafts guns and an F-5 squadron were deployed. However, an Air force Phantom aircraft was shot down by the *People's Democratic Republic of Yemen* by an anti-aircraft gun SAM-7 when they crossed the Yemeni border on November 24th, 1976.²⁵ This incident caused Iran to send in an Iranian Navy task force, consisting of a destroyer, landing craft, and a fleet auxiliary vessel to operate in Dhofar waters.

By November 1974, the Iranian Task Force had grown from a battalion to a brigade in strength, enabling it to engage in operations. However, the Iranian strategy to replace the initial battle group²⁶ with a less experienced unit resulted in a disappointing performance. For example, there were sixteen mine incidents on the roads and no offensive operations were conducted to counter the rebels' attacks.²⁷

The Iranian task forces were gradually withdrawn after eight years and were completely reserved after the fall of the Shah in 1979. Their performance was deemed inadequate because of their limited experience with mountain and monsoon warfare, in contrast to the Dhofari rebels, who excelled in these conditions. For example, on t December 5th, 1974, an Iranian company group of 190 men established a base deep into the area of *Rakhyut*, South West of *Salalah*. Their position was attacked by twelve to fifteen rebels who launched their attacked under the cover of the *Monson*, killing more than 50 Iranian soldiers, injuring the rest, and capturing the company's weapons.²⁸

Additional support came from Jordan, beginning with training assistance for the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Between 1974 and 1977, a squadron of Royal Jordanian Engineers operated in Dhofar, undertaking tasks, such as laying mines and barbed wire along the Omani-Yemen border, building roads, disposing of bombs and mines, and contributing to civil development efforts. In 1975, Jordan also provided a battalion of 555 men to relieve Omani troops guarding the *Salalah-Thumrit* road. In the same year, King Hussein gifted thirty Hawker Hunter aircraft to Oman. Unlike the Iranian forces, the Jordanian casualties were relatively lower, as their primary roles focused mainly on logistical support and guarding duties.

The British assistance combined military operations with civil development, believing the best way to undermine the rebels was to counter their claims of 'no development' in Oman. Following the rise of Sultan Qaboos, the British government provided various forms of civilian aid, including building roads, schools, and health facilities, digging water wells, and distributing propaganda in

²⁵Colonel Ian Buttenshaw, *Iranians Support to Oman during the Dhofar War* (Delhi: RAO Publication, 2013), 4.

²⁶There were 5 Task Forces that replaced each other, and their strength grew to reach 2467 of different ranks. In the final years they used Phantom air force planes to destroy the rebel bases. The Yemen Democratic Republic of Yemen anti-aircraft guns shot down one plane that crashed into the sea because it had violated their border. See, Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 329.

²⁷Ibid., 6.

²⁸*Dhofar War, 1965-1975: A Chronology and Synopses of Major Operations*, 24.

tribal towns and communities. By 1974, British casualties included around 21 killed and 27 injured, with additional fatalities occurring after 1974, though majority of which were contract officers and soldiers.²⁹

The newly established the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also contributed to the Sultan's efforts to fight against the rebels. The most important assistance was the deployment of two Rifle Squadrons from the Abu Dhabi Defence Force (ADDF), which were stationed in *Sohar* between October 1973 and January 1974. This allowed Omani Forces to be utilized in the *Dhofar* war. Also, in 1974 and throughout 1975 another detachment came from ADDF to guard the area that stretched from *Khatim Mulaha*³⁰ to Muscat, including important cities like *Sohar* and the Omani seaports on the *Batinah* coast.³¹

Another significant assistance was the discovery of Dhofari rebels embedded within the UAE's military forces and police. They were captured and handed over to Sultan Qaboos, who had them imprisoned in the notorious Jalali prison. Additionally, Sheikh Zayed, the President of the UAE, gifted several Ferret tanks from the Abu Dhabi Defence Force (ADDF) and provided financial support to the Sultan during his visit to the UAE in 1973.

UAE played a further significant role in disturbing the logistics routes that the rebels were using through the *Empty Quarter*. The ADDF established different inspection points throughout the desert using camel patrols to inspect the area. The TOS also used RAF aircraft to patrol the area, which resulted in one fatal crash near *Abu Hafafah* in 1963.

5. Dhofar Revolution: Contributing Factors for its Downfall

Many *Dhofaris* embraced the revolution, with the hope that it would liberate them of the cruelty of *Sultan Sai'd*. They did not understand the dogmas and ideologies that were offered by their comrades. The following points might shed light on the contributing factors, which lead the failure of the *Dhofar* revolution.

The political changes in Oman that took place in 1970 were the initial reason for establishing the Dhofar rebellion. The *coup d'état* that had replaced *Sultan Sai'd* with his more liberal and development-oriented son, Sultan *Qaboos* marked a significant change for the Omani society. The new Sultan's first step was to offer a pardon to those who surrendered, assuring them jobs and safety.

Sultan Qaboos' "Five-Point-based Plan," included a general amnesty, offering unconditional pardon to those who had fought against his father.

1. He moved his administration from Salalah to Muscat and designated Dhofar as the Southern Province.
2. He organized military operations against those who rejected his amnesty.
3. He initiated a major development program focused on education, health, infrastructure, and military reforms.
4. He worked to gain international recognition for Oman as an independent state.
5. He aimed to ensure political stability by promoting national unity, uniting Oman's tribal and regional factions, and fostering an inclusive government structure.

²⁹Peterson, *Oman's Insurgencies*, 327-28.

³⁰*Khatim Mulaha* is a border area between the UAE and Oman on the east coast of the UAE close to *Kalba*.

³¹Interview with General (retired) Abdullah Ali Al Kaabi, Al Ain, 2016.

This appeal was welcomed by tribal leaders, such as *Musallam bin Nufl* and others, who had grown disillusioned with the Marxists and the new leadership of the Revolution. As Muslims by faith and bound by tribal allegiances, they found that Marxist ideologies clashed with their norms, values, and religious beliefs. This dynamic exemplified the ideological confrontation between reactionary regimes and progressive movements in the Arab world. According to the author, Peterson, the Dhofar rebellion was an example of the ongoing confrontation. As a result, the situation was closely monitored by various Arab countries, with support directed either to the Sultan or the rebels, depending on each country's political stance.³²

Most tribal *Dhofaris* were engaged (after coming to the Sultan's side) in a new military force called *firgat*; they were dressed like rebels and led by British Officers. Those *Dhofaris* were the best source of intelligence and could easily guide the troops into the *Dhofar* mountains. This decision to re-engage the Dhofaris in support of the Sultan brought a dramatic change in the course of the Revolution.

Secondly, if it was not for the outsider military assistance, the *Sultan's* forces would have no chance to win the war. The strong support that came from various countries like Britain, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Pakistan played a major role in defeating the *Dhofari* rebels. The Iranian assistance was viewed with suspicion by Arab countries mainly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. The Shah of Iran, wrote Goode, "angered most of his Arab neighbours, who protested vigorously" for sending his troops to Oman.³³ Their interpretations were based on the deployments of his troops who were stationed in Dhofar for a few months before they were replaced by others. This was viewed by Arab Countries as training for future operations. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia as a regional power that would fill the vacuum after British withdrawal was another reason for such Arab concern. A third interpretation of the Shah's behaviour was his fear that the Iranian Communist Party (Tudeh) might be influenced by the success of the Dhofar Revolution.

The introduction of Communism into a primitive society that was deeply religious with tribal roots was not the answer to getting rid of the tyrannical regime of *Sultan Sai'd bin Taymour*. The Communist ideology deterred the people of *Dhofar* from supporting the Revolution. Indeed, the Marxist revolution failed to win people's support throughout the war. The new socialist leaders motivated the people to favour the new *Sultan*. Accordingly, people shifted their loyalties to the Sultan of Oman, particularly after he introduced social and economic reforms. Additionally, Sultan Qaboos, in collaboration with British and Jordanian intelligence, leveraged religion by distributing pamphlets in the *Dhofari* region, portraying communists as evil and claiming that Allah would destroy them.

³² J. E. Peterson, "Guerrilla Warfare And Ideological Confrontation In The Arabian Peninsula: The Rebellion In Dhufar," *World Affairs*, 139, No. 4 (Spring 1977): 278-295.

³³ James F. Goode, "Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman 1972-750," *Iranian Studies* 47 no. 3 (2014): 445.



Figure 3. *The Hand of God Destroys Communism*³⁴

It was difficult to undermine tribal loyalties, as the comrades belittled and re-educated them in schools run by socialists from various countries. Furthermore, the new role of women, being treated as equals to men encouraged them to become active members of the revolution. This marked a significant departure from traditional *Dhofari* society, which was met with skepticism by ordinary peasants. According to a communiqué issued in 1970 by the rebels' newspaper on June 9th, women were declared equal to men, with the right to marry as they wished, without the need for a guardian's consent or the traditional dowry system that men previously had to follow for marriage.³⁵ These revolutionary ideas, aimed at dismantling the traditional tribal system and encouraging women to participate in the revolution, proved catastrophic for the movement, as they violated the norms and values that had been practiced by *Dhofaris* for centuries.

The revolution expanded its goals beyond its original aims, which the *Dhofaris* had initially supported. This shift occurred at the Himrin Conference in 1968, when Marxists took control of the leadership and called for the liberation of the entire Arabian Gulf, targeting not only Oman but also other states, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Emirates.³⁶ This also alarmed the Shah, who feared that a rebel victory could lead to increased activity by the Iranian Communist Tudeh Party. In 1972, the British Ambassador was briefed by the Iranian Minister, relaying the Shah's directive that Iranian armed forces were prepared to assist in countering the *Dhofari* rebels, particularly the 250 fighters in the Ras Musandam area near the Strait of Hormuz.³⁷ This illustrates the revolution's impact on the Shah's thinking, prompting him to intervene for various reasons, including the protection of the Strait of Hormuz. It also highlighted how significantly the rebels expanded their guerrilla warfare beyond their original objectives.³⁸

Such a shift in the revolutionary aims did not resonate with the vision of ordinary *Dhofaris*, who were not concerned with freeing the Gulf from foreign imperialism. What truly mattered to them was the removal of Sultan Saeed and the development of their homeland, Dhofar.

³⁴“Dhofar War,” in *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhofar_Rebellion, Retrieved 27/6/2023.

³⁵Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Zofar Shahadah meen zaman althawrah [Dhofar: A Testimony from Revolution Days]* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books S.A.L., n.d.), 158.

³⁶Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 345-346.

³⁷FCO 8/187, Telegram from Tehran to FCO Telegram No., 898, 14th December, 1972.

³⁸The Gulf Committee, *Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf*, 13.

Finally, the factors that contributed to the *Dhofari* revolution became inextricably linked with the Cold War. Although the USA did not intervene directly due to its focus on Vietnam, its allies—namely Britain, Iran, Jordan, and the Arabian Gulf states—supported the Sultan’s forces against the communist rebels, who were backed by the Soviet Union, East Germany, and China. The *Dhofari* rebels relied heavily on the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) for its support. However, due to the PDRY’s instability and weak economy, it was unable to maintain its support for the rebels, leading to their decline and eventual defeat. The last rebel was killed on March 18, 1980.

6. Conclusion

The *Dhofar* Revolution had a significant impact on the British presence in the Gulf. On the one hand, Britain had been fighting the uprising rebellion in Oman to protect its interests in the Gulf, but on the other hand, Britain’s military operations in this area and the very presence of British troops became a source of provocation. As a result, it was easier for the DLF to encourage other nationalists in the Gulf to rally for them. Even though the Gulf was considered a quiet area, except for Bahrain, the DLF was able to contact the nationalist forces in the Trucial States as well as in Bahrain and Kuwait the *Dhofar* Revolutionaries attempted to link up with different nationalist groups in the Gulf, but initially, they concentrated on the *Dhofaris* working in the area. Most *Dhofaris* were employed in the armed forces or the police, and when they returned to *Dhofar* on vacation, some were recruited into the revolutionary movement who then sought to return to recruit other *Dhofaris* working in the Gulf in the late sixties. Other groups were discovered in the *Ras Musandam* Mountain region/Ras Al Khaimah by the British Desert Intelligence Officer, Captain Tim Ash, in early 1970.

The Dhofar Revolution had the most significant impact influencing both Oman and the Gulf who were no longer isolated from the global opinion. The conflict became a focal point for debates in Britain, the Arab world, and the international community. Awareness rose about Britain’s colonial involvement in Dhofar, with some even drawing comparisons to ‘Britain’s Vietnam.’³⁹

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

This research did not receive grant from any funding source or agency.

Bibliography

- Al Qasimi, Sultan. *Muscat, and other Forts on the Shoreline of the Gulf of Oman*, Sharjah: Al Qasimi Publications, 2009.
- Boustead, Hugh. *The Wind of Morning*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1971.
- Buttenshaw, Ian. *Iranians support to Oman During the Dhofar War*, RAO Publication, 2013.

³⁹The Gulf Committee, *The Gulf Bulletin*, no. 1 (London, 1971): 1; and Vienna Jean-Pierre, “Dhofar Guerrillas Fight against the Most Archaic of Government,” Summarized extracts from *Lemonde Diplomatique*, 4.1.1970.

- Buttenshaw, Ian. *Dhofar War, 1965-1975: A Chronology and Synopses of Major Operations*. Muscat: Royal Army of Oman Printing Press, 2010.
- Cordesman, Anthony. *The Gulf and the Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1984.
- FCO 8/187, Telegram from Tehran to FCO Telegram No., 898, 14th December 1972.
- FO 371/179929, 1965, Abu Dhabi army, H.M. Political Agency, Abu Dhabi 27 March 1965, Secret. Arabian Gulf Digital Archive, Abu Dhabi.
- FO 371/185365, 1966, *Omani rebel activity*, British Consulate General (1013), Muscat. Phillips, Esq., C.G., British Residency, BAHRAIN.
- FO 371/185365, 1966, *Omani rebel activity*, Letter from Bill Carden, British Consulate General, Muscat, to H. Phillips, Esq., C. G., British Residency, Bahrain 28th March 1966.
- Goode, James F. "Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman 1972-750." *Iranian Studies* 47 no. 3 (2014): 441–62.
- Halliday, Fred. *Arabia without Sultan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.
- Howarth, J. "An Appraisal of the Kuwait Operation of July 1961." MSc Thesis, Wales University, Aberystwyth, 1973.
- Jean-Pierre, Vienna. "Dhofar Guerrillas Fight against the Most Archaic of Government." Summarized extracts from *Lemonde Diplomatique*, 4.1.1970.
- Jeapes, Tony. *SAS: Operation Oman*. London: William Kimber, 1980.
- Kelly, J. B. *Arabia, The Gulf, and The West: A Critical View of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy*. New York: Baster and Bols, 1986.
- Ladwing, Walter C. "Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency: Britain and Dhofar Rebellion." *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 19. No. 1, (2008): 62–88.
- Peterson, J. E. "Guerrilla Warfare and Ideological Confrontation in the Arabian Peninsula: The Rebellion in Dhufar." *World Affairs* 139, No. 4 (Spring 1977): 278-295.
- Peterson, J. E. *Oman's Insurgencies: The Sultanate's Struggle for Supremacy*, London: SAQI, 2007.
- Price, D. L. "Oman: Insurgency and Development," *Conflict Studies* no. 53, (1975): 4–116.
- "Ta'līkan siyasiyyan li-l-Jabhah al-Sha'biyyah li-tahrir 'Oman wa-l-Khalij al-Arabi," *D irasat 'Arabiyyah*, vol. 9, no. 4, (February 1973), 112. Two political reports by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf.
- The Gulf Committee. *Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf*, 9th June Studies, London 1974.
- The Gulf Committee, *The Gulf Bulletin* no. 1, London, 1971.
- Tremayne, Penelope. "End of a Ten-Year War." *RUSI Journal for Defence Studies*, vol. cxxii, (March 1977).