

Grenadier Guards

Non-World War conflicts

Jebel Akhdar War 1954-59

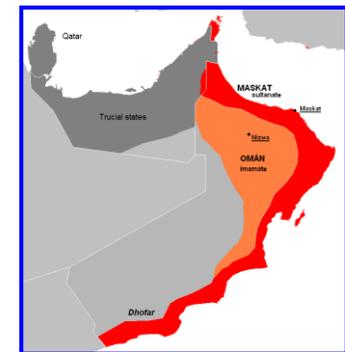


The **Jebel Akhdar War** was a series of conflicts during the mid to late 50s between the resident population of the interior of Oman which were supported by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, and aided by Great Britain, against rebels seeking independence and control of the interior lands and the oil reserves within it.

Oman was not previously the unified country as we know it today, from the period 1820 until 1970 it was known as the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. The coastal region was more secular and under the control of the Sultan of Muscat. The inland areas were more religious in nature called the Imamate of Oman, controlled by an elected imam.

Both of these areas together with bordering Trucial states were British protectorates, and in principle formed what we now regard as today's United Arab Emirates.

There had been fighting back and forth for many years, between Muscat and Oman. The Imamate was the stronger force with its support from Saudi Arabia, and Muscat the weaker as they lacked the slave and trade revenues that they once had due to European expansion and pressures.



British military presence in the area was integral and ongoing, and the Sultan's army was officered by British soldiers as was the neighbouring Trucial States. The Royal Air Force had bases in the region which were strategic, and within striking distance from Aden, Yemen.

Fighting and clashes had continued throughout the area until 1920 when British diplomats helped in forming an agreement between the Sultanate of Muscat, and Imamate of Oman.

The Treaty of Seeb strengthened the Sultan's rule over foreign affairs, and allowed the Imamate to control their own internal affairs without interference.

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British oil companies had been keen to explore for oil in Oman and in January 1923 an agreement between the Sultanate, and the British government was signed. The agreement required the Sultanate to consult with the local British political agent, and then obtain approval of the then British Government for permission to extract oil.

Subsequently in July 1928 an agreement called the Red Line Agreement was signed, the signatories being the Anglo-Persian Company (now British Petroleum (BP)), Royal Dutch/Shell, Compagnie Française des Pétroles (now Total), Near East Development Corporation (now Exxon-Mobil) and Calouste Gulbenkian an Armenian businessman. The agreement was to collectively search and produce oil in what was effectively the post Ottoman Empire region, which included the Arabian Peninsula.

Calouste Gulbenkian held 5% of the shares and each company holding 23.75%, the agreement held that none of the signatories was allowed to pursue the establishment of oil concessions within the agreed-on area, without including the other stakeholders. In 1929 the agreement members would go on to establish the Iraq Petroleum Company, or IPC.



Calouste Gulbenkian, was born 29th March 1869 in Istanbul, Turkey, and died on 20th July 1955, in Lisbon, Portugal. In 1911 he was instrumental in founding the Turkish Petroleum Company, later to become the Iraq Petroleum Company. He is credited as the first to exploit Iraqi oil and his 5% share in the Red Line Agreement made him one of the richest men in the world, and in 1948 he went on to negotiated the Saudi Arabian oil concessions to U.S. oil companies. His wealth allowed him amass an outstanding collection of art, which is stored and on view at his museum in Lisbon, Portugal. His Lisbon-based Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation aids activities in Art, Science, Cultural relations, social welfare, health, and education worldwide.



The Red Line agreement did not preclude other companies from pursuing interest in the region, and it was in 1933 that Standard Oil Company of California (now Chevron) won an oil concession with Saudi Arabia.

However, things changed when the oil company Aramco found evidence of oil reserves around the Buraimi Oasis in 1932 on the border of Oman, and the trucial states.

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Buraimi is an oasis which borders the states of Abu Dhabi and Oman, its spring water supports farming for the villages which straddle the Abu Dhabi and Omani border. The Jointly owned Saudi-American oil company Aramco had determined that oil lay beneath the sands around Buraimi, and Saudi Arabia laid claim to the land citing previously used non-permanent settlements.

There had been previous disputes between the Sultanate, and Saudi Arabia regarding the ownership of the Buraimi Oasis. The Treaty of Seeb allowed the Sultan of Oman to handle its foreign affairs and Sultan Said believed he was doing that, when he invited the Iraq Oil Company into his country to explore for oil. However, the Saudi influenced and newly elected Imam Ghalib bin Ali al Hinai had a different interpretation and considered the oil an internal matter, under the Treaty of Seeb. The stage was now set in 1954, for the Jebal Akhdar War.

Following a series of losses, the Sultan felt that his forces were unable to defeat the rebels and requested additional assistance from the British. The British government responded in July 1957 with additional military aid, infantry and Air Force bombers.

The rebels were soon compelled to retreat into the Jebel Akhdar hills, where they were able to established a stronghold.

During 1958 the RAF bombers attacked the rebels to little avail due the mountainous terrain throughout which, the rebels received supplies and weaponry from Saudi Arabia. Previous ground force attacks and efforts to impose a blockade had also proved fruitless, in deigning or dislodging the encamped rebels.

Then in 1959, two British SAS squadrons were able to scale the Jebel Akhdar and end the rebellion, in the process giving back control of the Omani interior to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman.



Following the defeat of the Imam the Treaty of Seeb was terminated, and the autonomous Imamate of Oman was abolished. The Imamate continued to lead a temporary government-in-exile in Dammam in Saudi Arabia, and for a time operated an Imamate Office in Cairo, Egypt while pockets of the fighting continued in Oman.

In the early 1960s the Imam was now exiled to Saudi Arabia had gained the support from his hosts and other Arab governments, but support dwindled and finally ended in the 1980s.

The imamate's cause was promoted until around the 1970's, and the 'Question of Oman' remained part of the UN General Assembly agenda for a number of years and was finally dropped in 1971.

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