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The Dead Hand of the Treasury: The Economic and Social Development of the Trucial States, 1948–60

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Abstract

This paper addresses an aspect of British policy in the Trucial States that has received scant scholarly attention. It examines British attempts to promote economic and social development in the Trucial States, and places this policy within the context of British attitudes towards the economic development of the colonial empire. During the 1950s Britain's interest in the Arabian Peninsula expanded, in notable contrast with the rest of the Middle East. One aspect of this expanded role was British efforts to improve the economic and social conditions prior to the discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi in 1958. British officials on the ground were concerned to improve the lot of the population of these impoverished shaikhdoms for a combination of political and strategic and ethical reasons. This article shows that attempts to introduce a modicum of economic and social development in the Trucial States were hindered by the Treasury's refusal to

provide adequate funds, and because of inherent problems in finding suitable development projects. Nonetheless, the plans put in place during the 1950s did provide the foundations for subsequent development programmes, which, in turn, drastically expanded as a result of oil wealth.

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