3 The Strait of Malacca

Next to the Sulu Sea the most pirate-infested region in Southeast Asia according to nineteenth-century colonial observers was the Strait of Malacca. The conditions for piratical activity were (and still are) in many ways formidable. The natural geography of the area, with many small islands, secluded bays, rivers and densely forested coastlines, was ideal for launching swift attacks and for evading capture afterwards. The southern part of the Strait of Malacca and the adjacent Strait of Singapore has throughout history been a bottleneck for regional and long-distance maritime commerce, which has provided raiders with a wealth of richly laden targets.

Given these circumstances it is unsurprising to find attestations of piratical activity in the Strait of Malacca since the earliest historical times.[1] Like elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago, piracy and maritime raiding in precolonial times were often linked to political processes, and the control of maritime violence and commerce was a key to political power as well as wealth. Piracy and maritime raiding thus fluctuated over time with political developments, and tended to increase in times of political instability and upheaval and, conversely, to decrease in times of political stability and centralisation.

The arrival of European navigators in the area from the turn of the sixteenth century triggered a period of political insecurity, characterised by an increase in piracy and maritime raiding perpetrated by both European and Malay navigators. In 1511 the Portuguese conquered Melaka (Malacca) on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, the main commercial hub in Southeast Asia, which led to a dispersal of the trade previously centred on the port-city and a decline in its prosperity. The conquest also led to an increase in piratical activity in the Strait due to the demise of Melaka's sea power, which previously had checked the activities of local raiders, and due to the Portuguese raids on Arab, Indian, Malay and other Asian shipping, and on coastal settlements.

[1] The earliest mention of piracy in the Strait of Malacca is probably from the beginning of the fifth century, when the Chinese Buddhist monk Faxian reported that the 'sea is infested with pirates, to meet whom is death'; Fa-hsien, *Travels of Fa-hsien*, 77. See also Wheatley, *Golden Kherosonese*, 82, for a fourteenth-century testimony.

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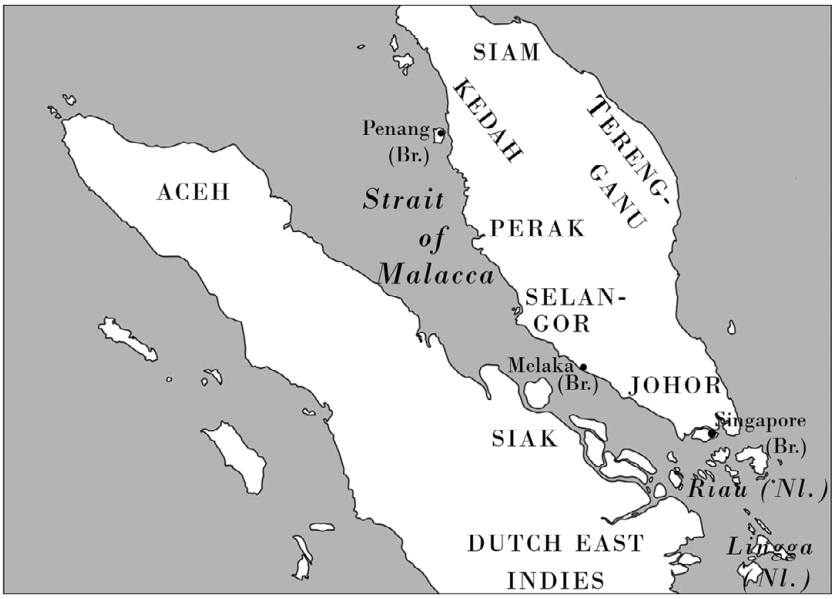

Map 3: The Strait of Malacca

As in the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese tried to establish the *cartaz* system in the Strait of Malacca (and other parts of maritime Southeast Asia), but they had too few ships at their disposal in order to enforce it efficiently. Meanwhile, the decline of Melaka paved the way for the rise of Aceh in northern Sumatra and for Johor in the Riau Archipelago, both of which competed fiercely for the remainder of the sixteenth century with the Portuguese and with each other for dominance in the Strait. As in the southern Philippines, maritime violence and raiding were the dominating form of warfare in the struggle for power in the Strait of Malacca throughout the early modern era.

Dutch Expansion and Notions of Piracy

From the turn of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were gradually pushed out of Southeast Asia by the Dutch and, to a lesser degree, the English. The Dutch East India Company established itself as the dominant power in the Strait of Malacca and much of the rest of the Malay Archipelago (except for the Philippines), particularly after they established a permanent base in Batavia (Jakarta) on the north coast of Java in 1619 and conquered Melaka from the Portuguese in 1641. The company's ruthless policy of conquering strategic ports and strongholds in the Indonesian Archipelago, killing or enslaving tens

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of thousands of people in the process, accelerated the decline of indigenous traders and rulers, and resulted in a sustained long-term drop in Southeast Asian commerce and prosperity.[2]

For most of the early modern period Malay piracy was not a major problem for the Dutch East India Company or other European navigators in Southeast Asia. The European vessels were generally larger and better armed than those of their Asian competitors, and they were thus less likely to be attacked. The prevalence of piracy and maritime raiding in the Strait of Malacca and other parts of the Malay Archipelago in fact often benefitted European navigators, both because it struck at their commercial competitors and because of the opportunities that such activities offered for trade with the raiders or their associates. The Dutch and other Europeans thus readily sold arms and munitions to Malay pirates in exchange for slaves, contraband and pirated goods.[3]

The fact that the Dutch thus indirectly thrived on piracy did not prevent them from using the word to discredit their enemies in the Malay Archipelago. For example, after the Dutch sack of Makassar in Sulawesi in 1669 large numbers of Makassarese and Bugis migrated and formed large fleets led by Bugis and Makassarese noblemen. They earned a reputation as formidable fighters and traders, and their services were welcomed by many indigenous rulers in the eastern parts of the Malay Archipelago.[4] They also engaged in maritime raiding, although piracy for private gain seems to have been relatively rare.[5] Dutch sources from the last decade of the seventeenth century nevertheless described the Makassarese raiders as full-fledged pirates, and decisive measures were taken in order to suppress them, even after most of the Makassarese diaspora had been repatriated to Sulawesi in 1680.[6]

Just as in England, the decades around the turn of the eighteenth century marked a shift in the Dutch attitude toward piracy and maritime raiding. In the Dutch case, moreover, the new policy was conditioned by the adverse effects that the slave raids had on Dutch settlements and interests in Southeast Asia. The raids mostly emanated from the southern Philippines and the eastern parts of the Indonesian Archipelago that were outside the control of the Dutch East India Company. From the beginning of the eighteenth century the Company began to take measures designed to suppress piratical activity, both in the eastern parts of the Indonesian Archipelago and in the west, in and around the Strait of Malacca. In 1705 the company issued a detailed regulation that limited the number of crew members and passengers that indigenous craft were allowed to carry, obviously without concern for the increased

[2] Reid, *Southeast Asia*, 2, 272–4.
[3] Kathirithamby-Wells and Hall, 'Age of Transition', 260–1.
[4] Ibid., 260–1.
[5] L. Y. Andaya, *Heritage of Arung Palakka*, 208–28; 226.
[6] Hägerdal, *Hindu Rulers,* 77–80.

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vulnerability that the restrictions entailed for indigenous traders. From the middle of the century three cruisers were engaged to keep the north coast of Java free from pirates, and during the rest of the century further measures were taken to ensure that the indigenous rulers with whom the Dutch had friendly relations would cooperate in order to suppress piracy in and emanating from their lands.[7]

Such measures notwithstanding, however, piracy and maritime raiding increased significantly, particularly after 1770, when raiding emanating from the Sulu Archipelago took off – stimulated, as we have seen, by the integration of the region into the commercial networks that connected Europe and East Asia and by the demand for slaves in the Dutch East Indies and other colonies.[8] The annual raids of the feared Iranun, or *lanun* (pirates), affected large parts of maritime Southeast Asia. Toward the end of eighteenth century the Iranun had also established forward bases in several places in the Strait of Malacca, including in Riau and along the east coast of Sumatra, and began to plunder the coasts and maritime traffic of the Strait systematically. The Iranun were drawn to the area by the opportunities for raiding offered by the burgeoning maritime traffic and by the power vacuum due to the decline of the Dutch East India Company and the political instability of the major indigenous power in the southern part of the Strait of Malacca, the Sultanate of Johor.[9]

The complex historical, social and political reasons behind the surge in maritime raiding in Southeast Asia from the end of the eighteenth century were not entirely understood by contemporary Dutch colonial administrators and observers. As among other Europeans, the explanations generally focused on racial, cultural and religious factors. With regard to the latter, Islam was believed to be instrumental in sanctioning piracy and slave-raiding among the Malays. Pieter Johannes Veth, who was one of the leading scholars on the geography, history and culture of the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth century, argued, for example, that piracy in the archipelago to a large extent should be understood as a form of *jihad*.[10] The religious antagonism, however, was less pronounced in the context of the Dutch East Indies than in the Spanish Philippines, and the Dutch did not try to make the Malays abandon their piratical habits by converting them to Christianity.

There was some disagreement among Dutch colonial officials as to whether certain groups of Malays should be labelled piratical or not, and as to which policies were most efficient for bringing an end to maritime raiding. The report by a Malay translator for the Dutch colonial government, Johan Christiaan van

[7] Cornets de Groot, *Notices historiques*, 3.
[8] See Vink, '"World's Oldest Trade"'.
[9] Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 197–8; Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, 58–9; cf. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 68–9.
[10] Veth, 'Heilige oorlog', 175–6.

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Angelbeek, from 1825, for example, presented an image of piracy in the Riau-Lingga Archipelago as a traditional way of life on the part the so-called Rayat Laut (lit. 'sea people'), embedded in regional patterns of dependency and servitude to Malay princes and headmen. Rather than suggesting a military solution to suppress piracy – which was the method of choice for most Dutch colonial administrators and military officers at the time – Van Angelbeek proposed that antipiracy measures focus on offering alternative sources of income to the pirates in order to wean them from their traditional way of life.[11]

For the most part Dutch efforts to deal with piracy in the first half of the nineteenth century focused on repressive measures. After the British handed back Java to the Netherlands at the end of the Napoleonic Wars the colonial authorities stepped up their efforts to enlist the support of indigenous sovereigns in an attempt to suppress piracy. The Malay rulers of several autonomous states in the archipelago, such as Lingga, Banjarmasin and Pontianak, signed, or confirmed, treaties of friendship with the Dutch government in which they, among other things, promised to punish pirates and not allow them to reside in their territory.[12] The Dutch, however, were aware that most indigenous rulers – to the extent that they were willing to cooperate in the suppression of piracy – had very limited means at their disposal, and the Dutch colonial government tended instead to rely above all on its own marine forces to suppress piracy and to prevent smuggling. Anglo–Dutch rivalry in the Strait of Malacca, moreover, provided a further rationale for strengthening Dutch naval power in the region, as did the Java War (1825–30), which brought about an increase in maritime raiding. As a consequence of these developments, Dutch forces in the Strait of Malacca, and in Southeast Asia in general, were much larger than the British. Dutch sea power was further strengthened in the 1830s, when a permanent coastguard was set up to suppress piracy and smuggling. In addition, several units of the Dutch Navy regularly cruised the colony's archipelagic waters throughout the nineteenth century.[13]

It seems that these efforts began to bear fruit from the 1840s, although it is not always immediately obvious which colonial power was responsible for the decline in piratical activity. In 1848, for example, there was a sharp falling-off in maritime raiding in the eastern parts of the Dutch East Indies. Dutch officials put this development down to the fear that the Dutch steamers aroused among those inhabitants of the colony who harboured piratical inclinations. It seems

[11] à Campo, 'Discourse without Discussion', 202–3; see further Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 35–8. The traditional way of life of the Rayat, or Orang Laut, were in decline at the time, however, in a process that had begun more than a century earlier; see Barnard, 'Celates, Rayat-Laut'.

[12] [Anonymous], 'Piracy and Slave Trade of the Indian Archipelago', 586; de Hollander (ed.), *Handleiding*, 88.

[13] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 68, 95; cf. Somer, *Korte verklaring*. See also Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, 58–62.

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likely, however, that the Spanish destruction of the Sama base at Balangingi in the beginning of the year was at least as consequential in bringing about the decline in maritime raiding – possibly combined with the withdrawal of support and sponsorship by the Sulu Sultanate for the Iranun and Sama raiders.[14]

As in the Spanish colony, there was little questioning among the Dutch of the use of the label *piracy* to describe the various bands of Malays who were responsible for the maritime violence in the archipelago, particularly in the press and among the general public in the Netherlands. The Dutch discourse about piracy in the East Indies tended to label all forms of maritime violence perpetrated by Malays as piracy and thus illicit, whereas coercive and violent practices on the part of the colonial government and European and other foreign individuals were seen as legitimate and regarded as a buffer against indigenous piracy.[15] The Dutch media was above all concerned with the extent and efficiency of the antipiracy measures taken and less with questioning the rationale and motives for designating various ethnic groups as piratical.[16]

To the extent that criticism against the promiscuous use of the allegation of piracy and the excessive violence deployed to suppress it was voiced in the Dutch context, it came largely from government officials in the Dutch East Indies. In 1838, for example, the governor-general of the colony, J. C. Baud, complained to the Dutch government about a naval operation in Flores that had resulted in the destruction of fifty vessels and seven prosperous villages, and left 14,000 people homeless. A few years earlier the Resident of Riau had voiced similar apprehensions about the use of indiscriminate violence against alleged pirate communities.[17] Such voices were nonetheless rare and seem to have met with little sympathy in the Netherlands.

Piracy and British Expansion in Southeast Asia

Piracy, as we have seen, had been a topic of great public interest in Great Britain at least since the beginning of the eighteenth century. As the British expanded into Southeast Asia, particularly during the following century, piracy frequently became the object of considerable controversy in Great Britain, more so than in any of the other major four colonial powers in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. The great British interest in piracy can be explained by the importance of piracy in the country's history, particularly in British overseas expansion – both with regard to the piratical imperialism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to Britain's leading role in the struggle to suppress piracy from the turn of the eighteenth

[14] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 96; de Moor, 'Warmakers in the Archipelago', 63. On the destruction of Balangingi, see Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, 343–78.
[15] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 119. [16] Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, 86.
[17] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 91–2.

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century. The cultural fascination with pirates as fictional or semifictional characters also served to stimulate public interest in piracy in its various guises.

Many nineteenth-century Britons associated piracy with the trafficking of slaves. The background to this association can be traced to 1807, when Parliament prohibited the slave trade and the Royal Navy was charged with the task of intercepting ships of any nationality suspected of trafficking slaves across the Atlantic. The Navy declared slave-trading to be on a par with piracy, a feat that served as a legal justification for the self-proclaimed right of Britain to intercept and search foreign vessels on the high seas.[18]

Apart from the effort to suppress the transatlantic slave trade, British anti-piracy operations in the first half of the nineteenth century were concentrated on the three areas where the problem seemed to be most serious: the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf and the Malay Archipelago. In all three areas the vast majority of the alleged pirates were Muslims, and in line with the arguments made by contemporary Dutch and Spanish observers, Islam was seen as a corrupting force that encouraged both piracy and the abduction and trafficking of slaves. Piracy also began to be linked to the lack of civilisation on the part of certain nations or races, particularly Arabs and Malays.[19]

John Crawfurd, a Scottish colonial official and scholar, who served in several capacities in the British colonial administration in Southeast Asia in the first half of the nineteenth century, was a leading proponent of stadial theory, and influenced subsequent British perceptions and policies pertaining to piracy in Southeast Asia. According to Crawfurd, there were hardly any maritime peoples in the Malay Archipelago that had not at one time or another engaged in piracy, and the only ones who were not inclined to piracy, at least not in present times, were the agricultural peoples of Java, Bali, Lombok, Sumatra and the Philippines under Spanish control.[20]

British commercial interests in Southeast Asia can be traced to the beginning of the seventeenth century, but their presence in the region was for a long time limited to the west coast of Sumatra, where the English East India Company established a trading station at Benkulu (Bencoolen) in 1685. During the following century, British interests in Southeast Asia, particularly the Malay Peninsula, increased because of its strategic location between India and China, and its commodities, particularly tea and opium. In 1786 the company established a free port called George Town on the island of Penang

[18] Wilson, 'Some Principal Aspects', 506, n. 5.

[19] Eklöf Amirell, 'Civilizing Pirates'; Layton, 'Discourses of Piracy', 86; for examples of such racist discourses, see Raffles, *Memoir*, 73, 78; Keppel, *Visit to the Indian Archipelago*, 1, 127.

[20] Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary*, 354. Comparing the inhabitants of the Malay Archipelago with the 'tribes of the deserts of Arabia', Crawfurd explained the prevalence of piracy and other forms of lawlessness by the uncivilised state of their societies; Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, 1, 72; cf. Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism*.

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off the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. A major purpose of Penang was to compete with the declining Dutch East India Company for the trade in the area, and Penang developed rapidly during its first decades, attracting large numbers of Chinese, Indian, Malay and European traders.[21]

The founding of Penang coincided with a surge in maritime raiding in Southeast Asia after 1770 and the establishment of forward bases of the Iranun in Riau and the east coast of Sumatra in the 1780s. This maritime raiding, combined with the political instability of the Sultanate of Johor, led to a deterioration in maritime security, which threatened the commerce and prosperity of Penang. To a large extent these concerns explain the increase in British allusions to piracy in the Strait of Malacca from the end of the eighteenth century, but there were also pragmatic reasons for labelling the Malay raiders pirates. In 1784, the British Parliament had passed the East India Company Act, which aimed to bring the company's rule over India more firmly under London's control. The Act, among other things, cancelled the delegating of the presidencies subordinate to the governor-general in Calcutta to make war or negotiate treaties with foreign potentates without explicit permission from higher authorities, ultimately from London, except in the direst emergencies. The provision thus limited the scope for local initiative, and company officials in Southeast Asia began to look for a way to circumvent the restrictions. By extending the term *piracy* to include not only raids against ships for private gain but also naval operations and other forms of maritime violence sanctioned by indigenous sovereigns, British officials in Southeast Asia gave themselves *carte blanche* to take military action without seeking prior permission from London or Calcutta. British officials in the region also believed that the Malay nobility and others engaging in piratical activity had to be convinced that the British would not confine themselves to defensive measures but would be proactive in their efforts to uphold maritime security in the Strait of Malacca and other major sea-lanes of communication in the region.[22]

The blueprint for much of British policy in Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century was drawn up by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, who served as lieutenant-governor of Java during the British occupation of the island between 1811 and 1815, and who in 1819 founded Singapore. Although Raffles gave different explanations for the prevalence of piracy in the Malay Archipelago in his many speeches and writings, he principally believed that piracy was a consequence of the commercial and political decline of indigenous commerce and polities due to the long-standing, ruthless and monopolistic

[21] See Cowan, 'Early Penang'. [22] Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 222.

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commercial policies of the Dutch in the archipelago. Such policies, according to Raffles, were 'contrary to all principles of natural justice, and unworthy of any enlightened and civilised nation'.[23]

Like other British observers in the nineteenth century, Raffles did not necessarily see a contradiction between the historical and the racial or cultural explanations, or, in the words of Anne Lindsey Reber, the 'decay' and the 'innate' theories of piracy.[24] On the contrary: both explanations were consistent with stadial theory, and both also sat easily with the Orientalist trope of the decline and decay of formerly great Oriental civilisations. The attractive implication of this line of argument was that the British had a special obligation to bring civilisation and progress to the Malays and thus to end the decay imposed on them by two centuries of Dutch oppression. The best way to do so, according to Raffles, was to suppress piracy and slave-raiding by providing commercial opportunities:

> We may look forward to an early abolition of piracy and illicit traffic, when the seas shall be open to the free current of commerce, and when the British flag shall wave over them in protection of its freedom, and in promotion of its spirit. Restriction and oppression have too often converted their shores to scenes of rapine and violence, but an opposite policy and more enlightened principles will, ere long, subdue and remove the evil.[25]

Raffles further argued that the British should support the indigenous Malay rulers and strengthen their authority over their shores and over the lesser chiefs, who frequently were the instigators of piratical activities.[26]

Such policies were implemented in Raffles's lifetime and afterwards by means of so-called agreements or treaties of peace and friendship. Hundreds of such bilateral treaties were concluded in the course of the nineteenth century between Great Britain or the East India Company and Asian sovereigns of greater or lesser importance. The agreements typically regulated matters of sovereignty, jurisdiction and commerce, always to the advantage of the British, who invariably were the economically, politically and militarily stronger party. From around 1820 most of the treaties – like the corresponding Dutch and Spanish treaties with indigenous rulers in the archipelago – included one or several paragraphs in which both parties promised to do their best to suppress piracy in and around their territories. There was no explanation or legal definition of the words *piracy* or *pirate* in the treaties, however, a circumstance that served to give the British colonial officials and naval officers on the spot

[23] Raffles, *History of Java*, 1, 255.
[24] Reber, 'Sulu World', 2.
[25] Raffles, *Memoir*, Appendix, 20.
[26] Raffles, *Memoir*, 227.

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great leeway in deciding what constituted piracy, and to deploy harsh and often arbitrary measures to suppress it.[27]

Anglo–Dutch Rivalry and the Suppression of Piracy

As in the Sulu Sea, the efforts of the colonial powers to suppress piracy and other forms of maritime violence in the Strait of Malacca in the nineteenth century were hampered by imperial rivalry. British expansion in the area was viewed unfavourably by the Dutch, who not only resented the commercial competition but also feared that that British might try to extend their territory and political influence to Sumatra, which the Dutch considered to be within their sphere of influence. The establishment of Singapore, which soon eclipsed Penang as the major British commercial and administrative hub in Southeast Asia, exacerbated these tensions, which in turn led to negotiations that eventually, in 1824, resulted in the Treaty of London between the two countries. The British ceded Benkulu to the Dutch in exchange for Melaka, and promised to respect Dutch sovereignty over Riau and other islands to the south of Singapore, whereas the Dutch withdrew their opposition to the establishment of Singapore. Both countries also agreed to take forceful measures to suppress piracy, but there was no concrete provision for naval cooperation or intelligence-sharing in the treaty.[28]

In 1826 the British merged their three colonies in the Malay Peninsula, Penang, Singapore and Melaka, to form the Straits Settlements, and six years later the administrative centre was moved from Penang to Singapore, which had undergone rapid economic and demographic growth since it was founded. The new colony was still a part of the East India Company's Indian possessions and subordinate to the governor-general in Calcutta. For almost fifty years, until 1874, official British policy was not to seek further territorial expansion in the Malay Peninsula or in other places around the Strait of Malacca. The emphasis was instead on maintaining friendly relations with the indigenous Malay Sultanates that controlled the rest of the peninsula, and on developing profitable commercial relations with merchants and producers regardless of origins or nationality. In contrast to the more aggressive policies pursued by the British in Burma, the policy in the Strait of Malacca before the 1870s was thus very much that of 'Imperialism of Free Trade', in the words of John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. It was a policy that in many ways was advantageous to the British, as it relieved them of the burden of administering

[27] See Aitchison (ed.), *Collection of Treaties*, 1, 271, 280, 283, 313, for examples of articles related to the suppression of piracy in treaties between Malay rulers and the British; cf. also Belmessous (ed.), *Empire by Treaty*; Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 206–11.

[28] Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, 83–110; see further Tarling, *Anglo–Dutch Rivalry.*

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vast territories populated by potentially unruly or hostile populations while at the same time bringing great commercial benefits to the British, such as access to markets and commodities.[29]

It was not only the British who profited from the country's free trade policy. The Straits Settlements also attracted large numbers of merchants and workers, including Chinese, mainly from Fujian and Liaoning (Kwangtung), Malays, Indians, Arabs and other Europeans. The population of Singapore multiplied in the decades following its foundation, and by the 1830s it had become the main commercial entrepôt in Southeast Asia.[30]

The Straits Settlements were vulnerable to piratical depredations, however, because they were an essentially maritime colony, the unity of which depended on the free flow of navigation in and out of the three settlements and between them.[31] Piracy and maritime raiding were a threat to the commerce of the colony and affected mainly the indigenous traders, whose small and weakly protected vessels were often easy targets for pirates. The problem was not alleviated by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, despite the two countries' promise to act forcefully against pirates. Moreover, although Britain's Royal Navy was the most powerful in the world, her sea power in Asian waters was limited and generally insufficient for the purpose of suppressing piracy and slave-trafficking.[32] As a result, piracy continued unabated throughout the 1820s and most of the 1830s, leading the Straits government to worry that native trade in the region would eventually become extinct.[33]

The opportunities offered by the boom in maritime commerce combined with the lack of political control – on the part of both the colonial powers and the indigenous Malay states – made the Strait of Malacca a haven for maritime raiding. Marauders from around the archipelago were drawn to the area, including Malays from Johor, Riau-Lingga and Brunei, Bugis from Sulawesi, Dayaks from Borneo, Iranuns and Samas from the southern Philippines, and Acehnese from North Sumatra. In addition, Chinese pirates began to arrive in the region, particularly from the 1840s, as piracy surged in the aftermath of the Opium War. European and American adventurers also at times seized the opportunity and engaged in piratical raids.

Some of the pirates operated out of the Malay Peninsula, but most of them (apart from the Chinese) were based in Sumatra or the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, which was, at least nominally, under Dutch control. There were both small bands of freebooters and those who operated under the covert

[29] Gallagher and Robinson, 'Imperialism of Free Trade'.
[30] Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, 33–75; Ken, 'Trade of Singapore'; Annual Report of the Straits Settlements 1855–56, in Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 32.
[31] de Vere Allen, 'Colonial Office', 23. [32] Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean*, 1.
[33] Mills, *British Malaya*, 263.

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sponsorship of local Malay rulers, sometimes sponsored or led by members of a royal family or other notables. The predations of the major bands of pirates sometimes took the form of large-scale expeditions that could involve dozens of vessels and hundreds of men who attacked vessels at sea and in port and made coastal raids, mainly for the purpose of capturing slaves.

As among the Dutch, British knowledge about the identity and origins of the perpetrators was often scarce and confused, particularly before the 1830s. Moreover, despite the Treaty of 1824, mutual animosity and suspicion persisted between the Dutch and the British. These circumstances, combined with the lack of sea power on the part of the British, the region's natural geography, the navigational skills of the pirates, and the speed and shallow draft of their vessels, rendered the task of suppressing piracy and other forms of maritime violence difficult for the colonial authorities.[34]

Colonial officials tended to regard all Malays as more or less addicted to piracy, at least those who did not practise agriculture. Fishermen and others who lived on the coasts or around the estuaries of rivers were believed to be particularly prone to engage in piracy. According to Crawfurd, who was the resident of Singapore from 1823 to 1826, the maritime Malays were 'barbarous and poor, therefore rapacious, faithless, and sanguinary'. Piracy, Crawfurd thought, was part of their character.[35]

Despite such pervasive claims, which tended to regard Malays as pirates by nature, there were colonial and naval officials who expressed doubts about the sweeping use of the label *piracy* in the Malay context. In 1832 the commander-in-chief of British naval forces in the East Indies, Rear-Admiral Edward Owen, rejected the use of the term *pirates* to describe the Malay forces involved in a dynastic struggle in Kedah. To the dismay of the governor of the Straits Settlements, Robert Ibbetson, Owen said: 'I could not treat as pirates any against whom no acts of piracy had been specifically alleged, or proof obtained.'[36] A few years later the commander of a British gunboat in the Strait of Malacca, Sherard Osborne, likewise contested the East India Company's labelling of a fleet of forty Malay war-*prahus* as piratical:

> This fleet of prahus, styled by us a piratical one, sailed under the colours of the ex-rajah of Quedah; and although many of the leaders were known and avowed pirates, still the

[34] Lombard, 'Regard nouveau'; cf. à Campo, 'Discourse without Discussion'; Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*. On the Dutch lack of intelligence about the pirates, see à Campo, 'Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity', 43–4.

[35] Crawfurd, 'Malay Pirates', 243.

[36] Cited by the governor of the Straits Settlements, Robert Ibbetson, who, on the other hand, was disappointed by the lack of naval support for the suppression of what he considered piracy; see Kempe, '"Even in the Remotest Corners"', 371. Ibbetson himself, moreover, also rejected the use of the label *piracy* to justify political action; see Rubin, *Piracy, Paramountcy and Protectorates*, 17.

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strong European party at Penang maintained that they were lawful belligerents battling to regain their own.

The East India Company and Lord Auckland, then governor-general of India, took however an adverse view of the Malay claim to Quedah, and declared them pirates, though upon what grounds no one seemed very well able to show.[37]

In the mid 1830s, however, the efforts to suppress piracy were stepped up, henceforth leaving little room for second thoughts as to who was a pirate and who was not. These renewed efforts had not only to do with the continued threat from piracy to the colony's commerce or the improved intelligence about the whereabouts and *modus operandi* of the perpetrators: it also gained strength from an Act, passed by Parliament in 1825, for encouraging the capture or destruction of piratical ships and vessels. The Act was originally passed for the purpose of suppressing piracy in the Caribbean during the Latin American wars of independence.[38] Most importantly in the present context, however, the Act established the practice of paying head money for the killing, capturing or dispersing of pirates:

[T]here shall be paid by the Treasurer of His Majesty's Navy . . . unto the Officers, Seamen, Marines, Soldiers, and others, who shall have been actually on board any of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or hired armed Ships, at the actual taking, sinking, burning, or otherwise destroying of any Ship, Vessel, or Boat, manned by Pirates or Persons engaged in Acts of Piracy . . . the Sum of Twenty Pounds for each and every such piratical Person, either taken and secured or killed during the Attack on such piratical Vessel, and then the Sum of Five Pounds for each and every other Man of the Crew not taken or killed, who shall have been alive on board such Pirate Vessel at the beginning of the Attack thereof.[39]

The Act did not require any adjudication of the criminality of alleged pirates, and killing them, rather than capturing or dispersing them, obviously facilitated the procedures for claiming the bounty, as there would be no one alive to dispute the accusation of piracy. Moreover, the stipulation that the reward for killing alleged pirates was four times that of dispersing them obviously encouraged the use of lethal violence and contributed to the brutality of British efforts to suppress piracy in Southeast Asia and elsewhere during the 1830s and 1840s.

[37] Osborne, *My Journal in Malayan Waters*, 22. The reluctance of the European community in Penang to intervene in the conflict was apparently linked to their commercial interests in Kedah; see Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean*, 375.

[38] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 101. The Act was modelled on an Act from 1803 (superseded two years later but with the relevant provisions retained) meant to create incentives for British soldiers and sailors to fight in naval battles in the Napoleonic Wars. In contrast to the 1825 Act, however, the precursors did not differentiate between the remuneration for enemies killed, captured or dispersed; Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 205.

[39] Ibid., 370, giving the full text of the Act (6 Geo. 4, c. 49).

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The Act was not immediately implemented in Southeast Asia after it was passed in 1825, probably because of uncertainty about whether it was applicable in Asian waters and with regard to personnel serving on board the vessels of the East India Company. In 1836, however, a naval encounter with a fleet of alleged Malay pirates set a precedent.[40] The British frigate *HMS Andromache* encountered three *prahus* with about a hundred Malays from the Lingga Archipelago. A Scottish officer, Colin Mackenzie, who was on board ship as a passenger, described what happened after the British had fired their cannons and hit the Malay boats:

> The whole crew having in their desperation jumped into the sea, the work of slaughter began, with muskets, pikes, pistols, and cutlasses. I sickened at the sight, but it was dire necessity. They asked for no quarter, and received none; but the expression of despair on some of their faces, as, exhausted with diving and swimming, they turned them up towards us merely to receive the death-shot or thrust, froze my blood.[41]

A claim was subsequently submitted to the Admiralty for head money, and in following year the Admiralty paid £1,825 to the crew of the *Andromache* for defeating the alleged pirates. Remarkably, the bounty was paid despite the fact that nine alleged pirates, who were taken prisoner in the encounter, were acquitted of all charges because there was no evidence that they had undertaken or planned to undertake any act of piracy when they were attacked by the British. The advocate-general in Calcutta also noted that the Malays had not fired at the British before they were attacked by the *Andromache*, thus implying that the alleged pirates had in fact acted in self-defence.[42]

Another problematic circumstance (not raised by the advocate-general) was that, even if the three *prahus* had indeed been piratical, as defined by the British, only about one-third of those on board were likely to have been raiders or warriors. The majority of people on board a Malay *prahu* used for war or raiding were normally slaves, prisoners or hired hands whose task it was to row the boat and wait upon their masters.[43]

The risk of killing innocent people was obviously even greater when the British, soon after the massacre witnessed by Mackenzie, intensified their antipiracy campaigns and began to attack whole villages suspected of harbouring piratical persons. The main advocate for this policy was James Brooke, who was able to enlist the support of the Royal Navy in his campaigns against alleged pirates on the coast of north Borneo. Consciously stretching the definition of piracy and arguing that piracy in Asia was fundamentally different from European piracy, Brooke, in a memorandum of 1844, urged the

[40] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 101; for the harsher measures employed by the British from 1836, see ibid. 81–90.
[41] Mackenzie, *Storms and Sunshine*, 64–5. [42] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 100.
[43] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 79; cf. Warren, *Iranun and Balangingi*, 171–2, 175.

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British government to burn and destroy all pirate haunts and disperse the pirate communities in order to eradicate the evil from the Malay Archipelago. The methods recommended by Brooke were diligently implemented during the remainder of the 1840s.[44]

The apparent discrepancy between, on the one hand, piracy in the legal sense of the word and, on the other, an allegation of piracy as a basis for claims to head money was resolved after a fashion by the High Court of Admiralty in 1845. In the so-called Serhassan case, named after a small island, Serasan, off the coast of northwest Borneo, where around thirty alleged pirates were killed and another twenty-five captured by a British naval expedition in 1843, the court ruled that the bounty claimed by those involved in the encounter was due, despite the lack of positive evidence that those killed or defeated were in fact pirates. In the opinion of High Admiralty judge Stephen Lushington, it was sufficient 'to clothe their conduct with a piratical character if they were armed and prepared to commence a piratical attack upon any other persons'.[45]

In the twelve years between 1836 and 1847 altogether £20,435 were paid for over 1,000 killed or (more rarely) captured Malay pirates, and £12,675 for some 2,500 dispersed pirates in Southeast Asian waters. During this time, the head money claimed from engagements in the Strait of Malacca and on the north coast of Borneo made up the bulk – more than 80 per cent – of total British payments for the capture and destruction of pirates worldwide.[46] The Admiralty, which paid the bounties, seemed to be of the opinion that if piracy was to be exterminated in the Malay Archipelago, there was little room for arguing about whether or not an attack had been justified or whether those killed were in fact pirates or innocent fishermen or traders.[47] Racial classification thus overrode other concerns, such as those pertaining to humanity and the rule of law, all under the colonial 'logic of the disposability of human life in the name of civilization and progress', as in another context Rolando Vazquez and Walter Mignolo put it.[48]

The antipiracy operations and the brutality used in them were controversial, however. In London, anti-imperialist politicians and humanitarian activists began to question the sweeping use of the term *piracy* in the Southeast Asian

[44] 'Mr Brooke's Memorandum on Piracy of the Malayan Archipelago', in Keppel, *Expedition to Borneo*, 302–14; cf. Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism*, 166–7.

[45] 'Serhassan (Pirates)' (1845), 2 W. Rob. 354, in *British International Law Cases*, 3, 779. See further Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 230–2, for a fuller discussion of the court's decision and its implications.

[46] Pirates: Return of bounties paid for the capture and destruction of pirates, under the Act 6 Geo. 4, c. 49, Parliamentary Papers (PP) 114 (1850), 5. Mackenzie, *Storms and Sunshine*, 66, meanwhile, claims that 113 pirates were killed, 9 taken prisoner and 8 escaped in the engagement of May 1836.

[47] Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean*, 380–1.

[48] Vázquez and Mignolo, 'Decolonial Aesthesis', vii.

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context and raised questions about who should be held responsible for the maritime violence and what the appropriate response of the British authorities should be. In particular, the brutal campaigns of James Brooke against the allegedly piratical communities of north Borneo began to draw sharp criticism in the press and in Parliament toward the end of the 1840s. Brooke was criticised, among other things, for designating as piracy what was actually intertribal warfare.[49] He was also chastised for the harsh measures employed to deal with the alleged pirates and the large-scale destruction of human life and property. With reference to the so-called Battle of Batang Marau in 1849, in which several villages were burned and some 500 alleged pirates killed, the Radical Member of Parliament Richard Cobden said: 'The loss of life was greater than in the case of the English at Trafalgar, Copenhagen, or Algiers, and yet it was thought to pass over such a loss of human life as if they were so many dogs; and, worse, to mix up professions of religion and adhesion to Christianity with the massacre.'[50]

The mass slaughter at Batang Marau led to a renewed effort to repeal the already criticised Bounty Act, a move that had begun a few years earlier, both for humanitarian and financial reasons. When the government, in 1850, demanded over £100,000 from Parliament to satisfy claims for head money – mainly for engagements in the South China Sea, but also including £20,700 for the 500 pirates who were killed and another 2,140 who were dispersed at Batang Marau – the process of changing the law was reinitiated.[51] The Act was repealed in 1850, although the practice of paying head money – now renamed 'prize money' – continued until 1948.[52]

While Brook and the Royal Navy campaigned against alleged pirates in north Borneo, piratical activity in the Strait of Malacca declined sharply, particularly during the second half of the 1840s. Between 1846 and 1849 there were only three reported attacks against British vessels committed by Malays or Dayaks, compared with twenty-two between 1840 and 1845: that is, a decline of 80 per cent on a yearly basis.[53] By the 1850s organised Malay

[49] Pringle, *Rajahs and Rebels*, 95; Walker, *Power and Prowess*, 232, n. 2; Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism*, 179–208. See also Keppel, *Visit to the Indian Archipelago*, 1–2, for a contemporary attempt to refute the allegations against Brooke.

[50] House of Commons Debate, 10 July 1851. Commons and Lords Hansard, Official Report of Debates in Parliament, vol. 118, cc 498–9. For the Battle of Batang Marau, see further Marshall, *Nemesis*, 208–15.

[51] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 101, 139; Fox, *British Admirals*, 112.

[52] Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 284, n. 168.

[53] Malay pirates. Return of the names of any British vessels attacked or plundered by Malay or Dyak pirates, from 1839 to 1849, PP HC 1850 (238).

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piracy had ceased to be a security threat in the Strait of Malacca, even though occasional acts of petty piracy and coastal raiding continued to occur.[54]

It is doubtful to what extent the massacres of the 1830s and 1840s were responsible for the decline in piratical activity toward the middle of the century. John Crawfurd, who in 1825 had recommended that the most noted pirate haunts be destroyed by way of example, now advised against such methods:

> The destruction of the supposed haunts of the pirates by large and costly expeditions, seems by no means an expedient plan for the suppression of piracy. In such expeditions the innocent are punished with the guilty; and by the destruction of property which accompanies them, both parties are deprived of the future means of honest livelihood, and hence forced, as it were, to a continuance of their piratical habits. The total failure of all such expeditions on the part of the Spaniards, for a period of near three centuries, ought to be a sufficient warning against undertaking them.[55]

By contrast, Dutch efforts to suppress piracy, particularly in the Riau Archipelago, were of greater consequence. From the 1840s, the Dutch began to take firmer control over the Riau Archipelago, where most of the pirates were based, administratively, economically and militarily. The Dutch also began, on a limited scale, to promote indigenous trade as a means of weaning the Malay elites from engaging in or sponsoring piracy and to encourage them to take active part in the efforts to suppress piracy. The Dutch also intensified conventional antipiracy patrols, and, with improved intelligence and enhanced naval capacity, they were able to capture many of the perpetrators, often at their landbases. Thus deprived of their safe havens and protection from local rulers and strongmen, the pirates had little choice but to withdraw to more remote locations in the archipelago, or to take up other occupations.[56]

For the Dutch in the Strait of Malacca, like the Spanish in the Sulu Archipelago, it was of key importance to assert their sovereignty or hegemony over Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago by preventing maritime violence from emanating from Dutch territory or spheres of influence, and to affect British interests or international commerce. These concerns came to the fore in the early 1840s, when British naval vessels engaged in antipiracy operations violated Dutch territory on several occasions. In 1841, moreover, the British announced that they were considering abrogating the 1824 Treaty of London because of alleged commercial discrimination by the Dutch. By efficiently suppressing piracy emanating from its territory, the Dutch sought to alleviate the risk of further British intervention in the Dutch sphere and to weaken support for a more expansionist British policy in the Straits Settlements.[57]

[54] Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary*, 355. [55] Ibid., 355. [56] Teitler et al., *Zeeroof*, 275.
[57] Ibid., 274–5.

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Chinese Piracy

As the depredations by Malay pirates declined in the Strait of Malacca in the 1840s, a new type of piracy appeared, which soon came to constitute an even greater threat to the indigenous trade of the Straits Settlements than the earlier form. This new type of piracy was directly linked to social and political developments in China and the South China Sea. The Qing Dynasty enlisted large numbers of Chinese junks as armed privateers in the Opium War (1839–42) against the British, and after the end of the war many of them took to piracy. The Chinese authorities had little will or capacity to check the depredations of the pirates, most of whom were based in or around the major trading centres of southern China, such as Canton (Guangzhou), Hong Kong and Macau. Firearms and munitions were readily available in these ports, and the pirates could also easily acquire provisions and dispose of their booty there. The British authorities in Hong Kong were notoriously corrupt and inefficient in the colony's early years, and local officials at times even colluded with the pirates.[58]

The first reports of Chinese junks committing piracy in the Strait of Malacca in the 1840s led the Straits authorities to increase antipiracy patrols. There was no permanent British naval base in the region, however, and the colonial government itself had very limited ability to combat piracy. For most of the time there was only one British colonial steamer available for antipiracy operations in the Strait of Malacca. Piracy nevertheless declined in the second half of the 1840s – largely, as we have seen, as a result of the measures taken by the Dutch in Sumatra and Riau – which led the British to believe that their own efforts were sufficient to check both Chinese piracy and the depredations of the Malay raiders based in and around the Strait of Malacca.[59]

The decline in piratical activity in the second half of the 1840s was temporary, however, and once again events in China spilled over into Southeast Asia. In 1849 pirates from southern China robbed a junk belonging to a British subject and killed two British officers off the south coast of China, which led the Royal Navy to step up antipiracy operations in the South China Sea. At least in part as a result of these and subsequent naval operations, some of the perpetrators moved their operations to Singapore and the Malay Archipelago.[60] The upheaval of the Taiping Rebellion in southern China, which broke out in 1850, further contributed to the surge in piracy on the South China coast and in the major rivers of southern China. Pirates soon extended their

[58] Blue, 'Piracy on the China Coast', 71–2; Boxer, 'Piracy in the South China Sea', 44; Antony, 'Piracy on the South China Coast', 41–3; Fox, *British Admirals*, 86–7.
[59] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 214.
[60] Antony, 'Piracy on the South China Coast', 42; Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 214.

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operations further to the western parts of the South China Sea, including the waters off Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Gulf of Thailand. By the mid 1850s heavily armed junks also preyed on maritime commerce in the waters close to Singapore and in the Strait of Malacca.[61]

On average there were between one and two cases of piracy every month reported to the police in the Settlements between 1855 and 1860, with Singapore making up for more than half, or forty-nine out of a total of eighty-nine reported cases, followed by Penang with around 40 per cent, or thirty-six reported cases.[62] These figures, based on the number of cases reported to the Straits Settlements police, were only a fraction of the total number of pirate attacks committed, however, a circumstance of which the authorities were well aware.[63] Frequently none of the victims survived to report an attack to the police, and even if there were survivors, many attacks that occurred outside the jurisdiction (that is the ports and territorial waters) of any of the three settlements went unreported. Moreover, because of cultural differences and language barriers, it is likely that many victims of non-European nationality did not report attacks to the police. The local press, by contrast, was rife with horrific stories of piracy, and the Singapore newspapers featured reports of pirate attacks nearly every week for most of the 1850s.[64]

The main targets of the junk piracy were the small trading junks that plied the South China Sea between Singapore and Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). Unarmed or lightly armed junks carrying various types of cargo, such as opium, textiles, livestock and agricultural products, were boarded and robbed at sea, both in the waters near Singapore and along the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, and further to the north, in the waters around southern Vietnam and Cambodia. The level of violence varied depending on the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators and whether or not the victims offered resistance. Many attacks involved the use of indiscriminate and lethal violence.[65]

The depredations had a visible impact on the maritime trade between Singapore and Cochinchina. According to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, the attacks brought about a sharp decrease in that trade in the junk season of 1853, an impression that is corroborated by official statistics. Between the fiscal years 1850–51 and 1853–54 the total number of junks arriving from or departing for Cochinchina declined from 255 to 156, that is,

[61] Elleman, 'The Taiping Rebellion', 53. See further Fox, *British Admirals*, about Chinese piracy and its suppression in the South China Sea in the mid nineteenth century.
[62] Numbers based on Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 40–1, 98–9, 173, 238, 292–3.
[63] E.g., Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 164, 188, 673.
[64] M. C. Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, 42.
[65] E.g., *Straits Times* (1 May 1855), 4. For an eyewitness account of a series of what seems to have been mainly nonviolent attacks by a pirate junk captured in 1859, see Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 202.

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by close to 40 per cent.[66] According to contemporary newspaper reports, only half of the Asian vessels bound for Singapore from the east managed to reach their destination in 1854.[67]

The decrease, however, was not evident in the aggregate trade statistics for Singapore: the value of the total registered imports and exports of Singapore in fact increased by 46 per cent between the fiscal years 1851–52 and 1853–54. The volume of trade with other parts of Asia was not affected by the piratical activity, and the number of junks arriving from and departing for China and Siam increased substantially between the two fiscal years.[68] Moreover, the share of trade carried by square-rigged vessels – which in general were larger and more heavily armed than the small trading junks – increased and compensated for the decline in the junk trade.[69]

The Straits government received little support from Calcutta with regard to gunboats or other resources needed to suppress piracy. In 1855 the merchants of Singapore sent petitions to the governor-general of India, the Royal Navy and both Houses of Parliament, asking for naval protection and improved legislation to deal with the problem of piracy, but with no result.[70] Calcutta's apparent lack of interest in the maritime security and commerce of the Straits Settlements fed into a long-standing and widespread discontent in the colony with being subordinated to the English East India Company in India. In a petition to Parliament in 1857 a number of merchants complained – among a host of other things – about the failure of the company to take the problem of piracy in the Strait of Malacca seriously:

> From the very first establishment of Singapore the trading vessels, and more especially the native craft, resorting to it, have been much exposed to the attacks of pirates. No systematic measures of protection have ever been adopted or carried out by the East India Company, who have been content to leave the service to be performed by the Royal Navy. Her Majesty's Naval forces being liable to be called away to other duties, can only act at intervals; and hence for long periods the neighbouring Seas have been left wholly or very slightly guarded and have at such times swarmed with pirates, to the great injury of the trade of this port.[71]

In view of the great risks of travelling by sea, many trading junks and other vessels were heavily armed with spears, swords, handguns, cannons and other weapons. According to the authorities, by the mid 1850s virtually all vessels leaving Singapore were heavily armed and appeared to have the means of committing piracy, but it was impossible to know whether they were armed for that purpose or for protection. Often the only times the authorities could be

[66] Ken, 'Trade of Singapore', 279; cf. Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary*, 109–10.
[67] Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, 41. [68] Ken, 'Trade of Singapore', 254, 276, 278.
[69] Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 99. [70] Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, 42.
[71] *Straits Times* (13 October 1857), citing the full text of the petition.

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certain were in the rare instances when pirates were caught red-handed committing a piratical attack at sea.[72]

The problem of identifying the pirates was not limited to the sea but was as pertinent on land. Singapore was in many respects an excellent base for fitting out and launching pirate expeditions, a circumstance that was frequently noted by contemporary observers.[73] In its early years, Singapore was even reputed to be a market for slaves captured by the Iranun and other raiders in Southeast Asia, despite the British commitment to the abolition of the slave trade.[74] By the middle of the century the Dutch resident in Riau, located just across the Singapore Strait, claimed that pirates had become both more deplorable and more frequent in Singapore than in Riau – which, as we have seen, until recently had reputedly been a pirate nest in the region – and that pirates based in both Singapore and Riau obtained their arms and munitions in British ports and sold their booty or exchanged it for ammunition there.[75]

Like Hong Kong in eastern Asia, Singapore was a major market for arms in Southeast Asia, and firearms and munitions were readily available for purchase. Moreover, there were no restrictions on the amount of armaments that a vessel could carry without being formally suspected of being a pirate vessel. The trade in arms was not regulated, and the importation of arms from Europe was an important part of the city's commerce. For example, in 1855, according to official figures, 3,659 iron guns, 15,259 muskets and 2,559 pairs of pistols were exported to Singapore, only from British and Dutch ports.[76] These figures did not include numerous unreported shipments of munitions. According to the governor of the Straits Settlements, Edmund Blundell, there was scarcely a mercantile firm in Singapore, regardless of nationality, that did not import large and small arms, military stores and ammunition.[77] Most of the arms were re-exported, particularly to China, where demand for arms and munitions was high because of civil unrest. Many weapons, however, also ended up on board pirate junks operating out of Singapore.

Besides the ready supply of arms, there were several other reasons Singapore was an excellent base for piratical operations. Unscrupulous crews could easily be hired, and information about the routes and cargoes of potential victims was easy to come by. Pirates could obtain passports and other papers from the Straits authorities by which they could pass themselves off as honest traders if they were visited by British, or any other nation's, vessels at sea. As a

[72] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports* (1855–56), 29–30; Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 214–27.
[73] E.g., Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports* (1858–59), 164; cf. Stibbe, 'Zeeroof', 823–4.
[74] Mackenzie, *Storms and Sunshine*, 66.
[75] Cited by Keppel, *Visit to the Indian Archipelago*, 1, 279; see also Temminck, *Coup d'oeil général*, 2, 224, for similar analysis. Blundell's report from 1855, cited in Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 222, demonstrates that the British authorities also were aware of the problem.
[76] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 29. [77] Chew, *Arming the Periphery*, 175.

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port of free trade, Singapore was also a good place for the pirates to dispose of their booty with little risk of questions being asked about the provenance of the goods. As there were no tariffs or duties on imports or exports, there was little incentive or interest on the part of the authorities to keep records of the goods that changed hands, legally or illegally. The police, consequently, generally lacked the means by which to investigate reported cases of piracy through tracking down suspicious goods.[78]

The police sometimes searched suspected pirate junks in port, particularly those with heavy, offensive armaments and little cargo on board, but even when the indications of piratical intent were strong, there was little the authorities could do to stop the suspected marauders from setting out to sea. A police report from 1856, for example, gives the following account of an investigation in Singapore Harbour, which was conducted after rumours had reached the police that pirate vessels were being fitted out:

> Junk No. 171 has twenty-three large Guns, most of them mounted; twenty-four Casks Gunpowder; number of Chinese Spears and Swords; a large quantity of shot, both small and large, with 13 Chests of Opium . . . This Junk looks very suspicious; she is apparently a fast sailer, and with her large armament, would take, with ease, any Junk or Vessel that came in her way.
>
> Junk No. 145 has thirty Guns, that is eleven large and nineteen small, all well mounted. She has also, in her hold, four very large Guns; they are lying right down in the centre of the hatch, and can easily be got up when wanted. Her powder is thirty-two piculs, with a large number of Shot of all sizes. Her cargo consists of sixteen Chests of Opium, Gambier and Shells in bags, with some empty boxes, and is ballasted with sand.
>
> Junk No. 143 has fourteen Guns, nearly all large; forty kegs Gunpowder; a number of Boarding Pikes or Spears, and a large quantity of shot . . .
>
> The whole of the Junks mentioned have a very suspicious-looking appearance. At present they have but few men on board, but when they are about to leave to proceed to Sea, they generally take in a large number.[79]

The rudders were removed from the three suspected junks in order to prevent them from sailing, but they were returned after a few days because no proof could be presented of their intention to commit piracy. The owners of the junks, according to the report, 'of course, naturally argued that the armament was designed solely for defence'.[80]

Governor Blundell advised his superiors in Calcutta to pass new legislation in order to enable the authorities to take effective measures against the pirates. One of his proposed measures was to give the Straits authorities the right to detain in port suspect pirate vessels without the need to present concrete

[78] *Straits Times* (1 July 1851); Ken, 'Trade of Singapore', 6; Keppel, *Visit to the Indian Archipelago*, 1, 279; Chew, *Arming the Periphery*, 161.
[79] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 29–30. [80] Ibid., 30.

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evidence of piratical intent.[81] The suggestion was controversial for the 'stretch of authority' that risked not only being inefficient but also bringing the government and the police into public contempt, as the *Singapore Free Press* opined.[82] Two years later a version of Blundell's suggestion was nonetheless passed into law in the form of the Indian Act XII of 1857 (Ordinance No. 7) on 'Piratical Native Vessels'. The Act stated that a native vessel could be seized and detained for up to six months by the authorities if there was reasonable cause to suspect that the vessel in question was a 'piratical vessel', 'belonged to pirates', 'intended to be used for piratical purposes or for the purpose of knowingly trading with or furnishing supplies to pirates'. The authorities were also invested with the power to order measures to prevent a vessel from going to sea if it was 'manned, armed, equipped, furnished or fitted out' in a manner deemed 'more than sufficient for the due navigation and protection thereof as a trading vessel'.[83]

The Act, however, did little to check the problem of piracy emanating from Singapore. In 1858, just like five years earlier, the authorities had to release six heavily armed junks, all of which had been detained on suspicions of piratical intentions under the Act. The junks were released after some 'Chinese merchants and shop-keepers of decided respectability' in Singapore had come forward and certified that the junks were peaceful traders.[84]

The law was in many respects a half-measure, and two of Blundell's more controversial suggestions in order to curb piratical activity around and emanating from the Straits Settlements were not adopted. One was the suggestion that the steamers and gunboats of the colonial government be given the right to visit, search and seize any suspect vessel, regardless of nationality, on the high seas. The governor argued for the legalisation of the 'apparently arbitrary seizures' which he believed were necessary, and he proposed that a powerful steamer, commanded by a 'young and active commander, manned by Malays and not encumbered with naval discipline and etiquette', nor with 'Common Law definitions of piracy' or the Admiralty's instructions to Her Majesty's Ships, be despatched to clear the Straits Settlements and its neighbourhood of all piratical vessels.[85] The suggestion was rejected by the Indian Government, however, on the grounds that it was beyond the colonial government's power to legislate on matters relating to the high seas and the law of nations.[86]

Although the governor failed to obtain legal sanction for some his proposed measures, antipiracy patrols and search operations were eventually stepped up

[81] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 227. [82] *Singapore Free Press* (11 November 1853).
[83] 'Piratical Native Vessels', Ordinance No. 7 [Indian Act XII of 1857; 29 May 1857], in *Laws of the Straits Settlements*, 1, 35–7. For the discussions preceding the passing of the ordinance, see Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 221–7.
[84] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports* (1858–59), 164–5. [85] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 223.
[86] Ibid., 224–5.

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in order to suppress Chinese piracy. British vessels in the area – both the colonial steamers and the gunboats of the Royal Navy – interpreted their right to visit, search and seize suspected pirate vessels on the high seas generously. The antipiracy operations began to bear fruit toward the end of the 1850s. In May 1858 the colonial steamer *Hooghly* captured two suspected junks and brought them to Singapore, and in May the following year the Royal Navy's corvette *Esk* captured another two piratical junks, after they had managed to fight off the *Hooghly*. In each case there were about fifty Chinese on board, all of whom were convicted and sentenced to transportation to Bombay.[87]

Perhaps the most controversial of Blundell's suggestions was to curb the free trade in munitions (but not in arms) in the Straits Settlements, a trade that obviously stimulated piracy, not only in the Strait of Malacca and the Malay Archipelago in general, but also in China and the South China Sea. The problem was that the trade was extremely profitable and a cornerstone of the commercial success of the Strait Settlements. After the founding of the colony in 1826, the English East India Company had been given virtually free rein to trade in arms, even though there were strong concerns already at the time about the risk that arms and munitions that passed into Asian hands might be used in uprisings and piratical attacks. The company was nonetheless licensed to supply munitions to Asian buyers, but only in 'deserving' cases, including to indigenous rulers who ventured to suppress piracy and other disturbances in their territories. The scope of the licence was lavishly interpreted, however, and the second half of the 1820s saw an explosion in the colony's arms trade, which in turn fuelled the increase in piratical activity in the region at the time. In 1828 an attempt was made to restrict the arms trade in and out of Singapore, but the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India in London decided to abandon the attempt after protests from Singapore merchants. The argument was that the restrictions were useless because munitions were readily available in the archipelago from American and French traders.[88]

As thirty years earlier, thus, Blundell's suggestion to restrict the Singapore arms trade did not meet with approval, neither in the Straits Settlements nor in London or Calcutta. It was obviously deemed more important from the colony's and Britain's point of view that the lucrative trade continue to prosper than to curb the proliferation of arms that fuelled piratical activity. Free trade, in other words, took precedence over maritime security.

[87] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, p. 164; see also the appendices to the report, 197–202. For the trial of the pirates of the junks captured by the *Hooghly*, see *Straits Times* (10 July 1858). While on their way to Bombay, one of the pirate gangs killed their guard and tried to take control of the vessel, but were overpowered by the British troops on board; Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 208.

[88] Chew, *Arming the Periphery*, 174–5.

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When the export of arms eventually was regulated, in 1863, it was not primarily for the purpose of discouraging piratical activity but mainly for the purpose of preventing wars and major uprisings directly affecting British interests in Asia. Concerns over such disturbances were aggravated, particularly in the wake of the Indian Rebellion (1857–58) and the Second Opium War (1856–60) in China, both of which involved armed violence against British citizens and interests.[89]

After 1860, junk piracy in the Straits largely subsided for several reasons. The arrest of two of the major bands of Chinese pirates operating out of Singapore in 1858–59 was of some consequence, but of greater importance were the political developments in China, particularly the end of the Second Opium War in 1860 and the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion in 1864. Around the same time China and Britain agreed to cooperate in the suppression of piracy and China agreed to support British warships in pursuit of pirates within Chinese territory.[90] From the 1860s the Chinese authorities also began to take more decisive measures to suppress piracy in and emanating from their territory as part of a broader attempt at the time to strengthen and modernise the military and civil administration. Taken together, these developments brought about a decline in Chinese piracy in the Strait of Malacca.

Chinese piracy did not disappear from Southeast Asia, however. Squeezed between the antipiracy operations of the Chinese, British, Dutch and other colonial powers, both in China and the South China Sea, and in the Malay Archipelago, Chinese pirates increasingly took refuge in the Gulf of Tonkin, where, as we shall see, they continued to wreak havoc.

'Highway Robbery at Sea'

Although Malay piracy had declined in the 1840s, it continued on a smaller scale far beyond the middle of the century, and it would, in the estimation of John Crawfurd, be as hopeless to exterminate it as it would be to put an end to 'burglary and theft in the best ordered states of society'.[91] An unintended consequence of the increased Dutch control over Riau was that many of the pirates moved and dispersed to various locations around the Strait of Malacca. Attacks thus continued to occur, not only in the vicinity of Singapore and in the southern parts of the Strait, but also along the east coast of Sumatra and along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula.

[89] Ibid., 176.
[90] 'Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Commerce, between Great Britain and China', 6 June 1858, in Hertslet (ed.), *Hertslet's China Treaties*, 1, 35 (Art. 52–3). The treaty was ratified by China in 1860.
[91] Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary*, 355.

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Although they were less serious than the acts of Chinese piracy, the depredations of Malay pirates were a nuisance to traders and colonial officials in both the British and the Dutch colony. These were difficult to suppress, moreover, because information about the hideouts of the perpetrators was difficult to come by, and large expeditions were for the most part inefficient against the scattered pirates. When detected red-handed, the perpetrators of an attack were often able to make a swift escape into one of the many small rivers and creeks of the Malay Peninsula or Sumatra, where the large colonial steamers and gunboats could not follow them because of their deep draft. Cruising against the pirates was also difficult because of problems of recognition and, interpretation, and, while at sea, pirates were often indistinguishable from traders or fishermen.[92]

Many petty pirate attacks occurred in the vicinity of Singapore in the late 1850s and early 1860s. The perpetrators generally used small, inconspicuous boats, such as Malay *sampans* (small, flat-bottomed boats, usually with a shelter on board) and they tended to carry only light and inconspicuous armament, such as muskets and cutlasses. In contrast to the heavily armed pirate junks that were equipped with cannons, stinkpots, boarding pikes and other offensive weapons, there was thus little about the piratical *sampans* that a priori indicated criminal intent. Another circumstance that favoured the operations of the pirates was that they were able to dispose of their plunder quickly and in ways that were difficult for the authorities to detect. The loot from pirate attacks in British waters or against British vessels was often carried off to neighbouring islands beyond the jurisdiction of the British.[93]

This type of 'highway robbery' at sea, as it was labelled in an official report, was not a security threat to the Straits Settlements, and its frequency was not so great as to have a serious impact on trade in and out of the colony.[94] At the same time, however, the attacks were often violent and brutal. In several instances they involved the murder of the victims, even when they did not offer resistance. In the year between May 1859 and April 1860, for example, eight people were reportedly murdered by Malay pirates in various locations around the Straits colony.[95]

According to newspaper reports one particular gang of Malay pirates, based in the Riau Archipelago and led by a man from the island of Galang, Pak [Pah] Ranti, was responsible for the attacks. For several years Pak Ranti managed to avoid capture by the Straits Settlements police, despite several close brushes. In 1859, he attacked a police boat with a crew of six men and a Malay officer, killing the officer and three of the policemen, an event that led the police to intensify their efforts to defeat the band.[96] A series of unsuccessful operations and fruitless chases, accompanied by false reports of Pak Ranti's capture or

[92] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 209–11, 213, 214. [93] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 165.
[94] Ibid., 164. [95] Ibid., 164, 188, 210. [96] Ibid., 210; *Straits Times* (21 September 1861).

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defeat, however, led the police to be chastised in the Singapore press for its alleged incompetence and overzealous efforts in pursuing pirates. The *Straits Times*, in an editorial, argued that pirate-hunting seemed to be a 'pleasant and exciting [occupation] with a touch of [the] romantic about it' and that it too readily distracted the police from their 'dull routine duties'.[97] Such views demonstrated the extent to which piracy by the early 1860s had been desecuritised and was no longer seen as a major threat to the commerce and prosperity of the Straits Settlements, despite the violence and the risk that the attacks posed to local traders and fishermen.

If chasing pirates could be described as a romantic pursuit, there seems to have been little that was romantic about being a Malay pirate at the time. A captured member of Pak Ranti's gang confessed in 1861 to having been a pirate for three years, earning only his food and getting no share of the spoils. He and his comrades were frequently chased by the police and forced to hide in the jungle for several days. On several occasions members of the band were killed and their boats captured. Sometimes they lacked food, and most of the village chiefs in Riau, where the pirates were based, would have nothing to do with them.[98] This testimony shows the extent to which piracy and maritime raiding, in only a couple of decades since the mid 1840s, had ceased to be an attractive or even feasible occupation in and around the Strait of Malacca.

The Straits Settlements police, aided by the Raja of Johor, who was on friendly terms with the British, eventually succeeded in bringing the ravages of Pak Ranti to an end through their relentless pursuit of the pirates and the issue of a reward for any information that would lead to the capture of the pirate chief. At the end of 1861, he gave himself up to a local chief in Riau who was loyal to the Dutch. The reason, according to the British report, was the continual harassment that he and his followers had suffered for several years at the hands of the police.[99]

Following the capture of Pak Ranti the number of piracies reported to the Straits Settlements authorities declined, and only a few isolated attacks on small native crafts, most of them of a trifling nature, were reported in the following years.

In the long term, the successful suppression of small-scale Malay piracy in and around the Straits Settlements was in large part due to a new strategy on the part of the authorities. Regular patrols were launched, not only in the territorial waters of the Settlements and in the vicinity of its ports, but also

[97] *Straits Times (*7 December 1861); see also *Straits Times* (31 August 1861).
[98] *Straits Times* (21 September 1861).
[99] House of Commons, Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India, 1861–62 (1863), 646; Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 318; *Straits Times* (7 December 1861).

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along the coast of the Malay Peninsula. *Tonze*, a former so-called penny ferry, which previously had been used to carry passengers on the Thames in London, was brought to the Straits Settlements and converted to a gunboat. She was attached to Melaka and employed to patrol the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and its many rivers and estuaries in order to deter any piratical activity.[100] Another, similar, vessel, the *Mohr*, was attached to Penang. Despite some initial doubts about the suitability of the penny ferries for military or law enforcement purposes, they proved able to perform their duties efficiently. They drew little water, which enabled them to cross the bars that existed at most river mouths in the peninsula and thus penetrate far into the interior, thereby making it more difficult for the pirates to elude pursuit by seeking shelter upstream.[101]

As a result of these efforts petty piracy could finally be effectively checked, and in 1864–65 only one incident was reported in British territorial waters, probably the lowest since the founding of the Straits Settlements almost forty years earlier. Outside the British jurisdiction, however, deadly pirate attacks continued to occur occasionally, as attested by the discovery of the dead bodies of three Siamese, who evidently had been murdered at sea, on the shore near Kuala Buka in Terengganu in 1865.[102]

Resurgence of Piracy in the North

The lull in piratical activity turned out to be temporary. From the end of the 1860s small-scale piratical activity resurged, now in the northern parts of the Malay Peninsula between Penang and Melaka. As earlier, many attacks went unreported by the colonial authorities because they occurred outside the British (or Dutch) jurisdiction. However, to the extent that the attacks befell British subjects – including merchants, shipowners, crew and passengers residing in the Straits Settlements but not necessarily of British nationality – or were attended with murder, the piracies were brought to the attention of the authorities as well as the general public.

The renewed wave of piracy was linked to the social and political upheaval in the Sultanates of Perak and Selangor. Initially it seemed that most of the pirates came from Perak in connection with an ongoing conflict over the control of the tin-mining district of Larut in Perak. After civil war broke out in Selangor in 1866, however, the main theatre of piratical activity in the Strait of Malacca seemed to shift, and Selangor soon gained a reputation among the British for being the most formidable pirates' nest in the region.[103]

[100] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 487. [101] Ibid., 336. [102] Ibid., 560.
[103] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 673; see also 777–8 for a summary of the antipiracy measures taken to suppress petty piracy.

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The background to the unrest in Selangor was a dispute between two of the country's leading chiefs, Raja Abdullah and Raja Mahdi, over the control and taxation rights in the district of Klang in western Selangor. Both sides kept boats in the Strait of Malacca, off the coast of Selangor, by means of which they tried to cut off the communications and supply lines of the other side. In that context, some trading vessels from Melaka became victims of minor acts of plunder. Such incidents occurred with relative frequency, but they were for the most part relatively insignificant and did not involve the murder of crew and passengers.[104]

To the British the piratical activity emanating from Perak and Selangor seemed qualitatively different from the petty piracy that had taken place in the waters off Singapore a few years earlier. The new type of piracy appeared to be organised and sponsored by leading Malay chiefs, whose allegiance to the Sultans of Perak and Selangor, respectively, was but nominal. From the British perspective the chiefs seemed to believe that their rank gave them the right to rob and molest seafarers with impunity and that doing so could even be considered an honourable occupation. John McNair, a British colonial official who served in Singapore at the time, wrote with reference to Perak that 'piracies are, for the most part, chieftain-like raids. There is no petty thieving, but bold attacks upon vessels by men who seem to have considered that they had a right to mulct the travellers on the great highway of the sea at their will'.[105]

The resurgence of piracy in Perak and Selangor in the second half of the 1860s seemed, in this sense, to resemble traditional maritime raiding in the region, which was seen by the perpetrators – but not necessarily by the victims or the Malay population in general – as a legitimate and even honourable pursuit. Raja Mahdi was a particular scapegoat in British eyes, who was made out to be a pirate and a thoroughly bad character. At the same time, however, the British had reports that he was admired by his followers as a courageous and chivalrous 'Malay warrior of the old school', as Richard Wilkinson, a British colonial official and historian, put it.[106]

What was at stake for the British was not only the suppression of piracy and security for maritime traffic and commerce: British investors also looked at the Malay Peninsula with a view to exploiting the economic opportunities provided by the booming tin industry and other natural resources. The unstable political situation in Selangor and Perak was aggravated by the influx of rival Chinese societies involved in tin-mining. Political instability was thus increasingly seen as an obstacle to the economic interests of British and other

[104] Gullick, *History of Selangor,* 56–8. [105] McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, 270.
[106] Wilkinson, *History of the Peninsular Malays*, 145–6; cit., 145; cf. Gullick, 'Tunku Kudin', 8.

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businessmen based in the Straits Settlements. Toward the end of 1860s the traditional noninterventionist policy that the Indian government had adhered to in the region since the establishment of the Straits Settlements began to be regarded as obsolete by leading officials and merchants in the colony. Moreover, the case for a more expansionist British policy was strengthened by the rise of Germany as an imperial power and fears that the Germans might try to establish a naval station in the region.[107]

Against that background, the acting governor of the Straits Settlements, Colonel Edward Anson – who substituted for Governor Harry Ord, on leave at the time – took the initiative to appoint a committee to report on the colony's relations with the Malay states. The report, dated 19 May 1871, recommended the introduction of a residential system modelled on that used for indirect British rule in India. A British resident (or 'political agent') was to be appointed to the Malay Sultanates who would advise the Sultans on all policy matters of concern to the British, which, in principle, included everything except questions related to Malay religion and custom.[108]

In London, however, the Liberal government, led by Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, continued to maintain the policy of nonintervention, leaving little room for the Straits government – especially under the aegis of an acting governor – to exercise any influence over the developments in Perak and Selangor. For those in the colony who favoured a more interventionist policy, such as Anson, a resurgence in piratical activity in or emanating from the two states could be regarded as a welcome development that might provide the pretext for an intervention.[109]

The Selangor Incident

In June 1871 a particularly gruesome pirate attack, in which thirty-four men, women and children were murdered, reportedly took place in the Strait of Malacca. The alleged perpetrators were fourteen Chinese, who boarded the junk *Kim Seng Cheong*, bound for Larut in Perak, as passengers shortly after its departure from Penang. Apart from the passengers and crew, the junk was said to be carrying a general cargo worth about $7,000, including $3,000 in specie.[110]

[107] McIntyre, *Imperial Frontier*, 203; Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*.
[108] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 82–5; for the report, see Report of the Committee on Native States, 19 May 1871, CO 273/47 (TNA). See also Fisher, 'Indirect Rule', 423.
[109] Tarling, *Piracy and Politics*, 228–30.
[110] Anson to Earl of Kimberley, 14 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 1; newspaper clipping citing the *Penang Argus*, 1 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 14–15.

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The attack on the *Kim Seng Cheong* – if, indeed, it happened as officially reported – was not just 'a simple case of piracy', as put by one historian.[111] It was the most lethal and ruthless known pirate attack in the Strait of Malacca for several decades, and it happened at a time when piratical activity seemed, once and for all, to have subsided. For nine months before the attack there had been no acts of piracy reported at all in the Straits Settlements.[112] As the attack on the *Kim Seng Cheong* befell a ship owned by a Chinese firm based in the British colony, and as the perpetrators had boarded the junk in the vicinity of a British port, governor Anson saw it as his duty to take action in order to apprehend the perpetrators and, if possible, recapture the junk and its cargo. At the same time, however, Anson's handling of the affair must also be understood against the background that he, like many other leading officials in the Straits Settlements, took a great personal interest in the problem of piracy and that he was in favour of a more interventionist colonial policy with regard to the Malay states.[113]

The general sequence of the ensuing events is well documented, both in contemporary sources and in the literature.[114] Upon receiving news of the missing junk and the suspected pirate attack, Governor Anson despatched the colonial steamer *Pluto* to search for her. Having secured, at least nominally, the cooperation of the Selangor government, as represented by the Sultan's eldest son, Raja Musa, the *Pluto* proceeded north along the coast of Selangor in search of the junk. Unexpectedly, according to Anson, the junk was found at anchor off the mouth of the Selangor River, an area that was under the control of Raja Mahdi, who, as we have seen, was accused by the British of being a pirate and a bad character in general. The junk was seized, and six suspected pirates who were on board were arrested. A detachment from the *Pluto* proceeded ashore to capture the remaining culprits and reclaim whatever part of the cargo they could find. They managed to arrest another three suspects, but

[111] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 85. There are several lapses and inconsistencies in the official documents and subsequent developments, which, taken together, cast doubt on the official version of what happened. There seems to be no record of who the thirty-four murdered people were, and no bodies appear to have been found at sea or been washed ashore in the weeks or months following the attack. Another conspicuous circumstance is that, although a number of suspected perpetrators were arrested soon after the attack, it is unclear whether the trial against them was ever held; cf. Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 249.

[112] Acting Governor Anson to the Earl of Kimberley, 19 October 1871, in PP C.466 (1872), 37.

[113] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 83, n. 38; Robinson to Anson, 6 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 10.

[114] The main British sources are collected in PP C.466 (1872), and CO 273/48 (TNA) contains some additional relevant material. For the literature, see Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 66–98; Parkinson, *British Intervention*, 47–58; the summary of events given here builds, unless otherwise stated, on the latter. See also MacIntyre, 'Britain's Intervention in Malaya', 57–9; de Vere Allen, 'Colonial Office', 22–3; Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 245–58 for additional (critical) perspectives on the affair.

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a fourth, believed to be the leader, escaped with the assistance of another Malay chief, Raja Mahmood. He assembled a large group of armed men and threatened to kill the British, who were forced to retreat, some of them swimming, back to the *Pluto*. The British left Selangor with the junk in tow under fire from Raja Mahdi's stockade.

Upon receiving the report of the confrontation, Anson requested the assistance of the Royal Navy's gunship *Rinaldo*. Anson's exact instructions are not known, but they obviously included the capture of the remaining six pirates and the retrieval of the stolen property from the *Kim Seng Cheong*. In addition, the Commander of the *Rinaldo*, Captain George Robinson, later claimed that the purpose of the operation was salutary, that is, 'to take such measures as may seem best for the punishment of those Malays who resisted the Colonial officers and men in their attempt to secure the pirates'.[115]

The *Rinaldo* met with the *Pluto* and proceeded to Selangor, where they anchored at the bar of the Selangor River. A detachment of troops, led by Robinson, proceeded up the river in small boats. As they went ashore to search for the suspected pirates, a skirmish occurred in which one British soldier was killed and six injured, which forced the party to retreat back to the *Rinaldo*.[116] The wounded soldiers were taken back to Penang on the *Pluto*. The following morning, at high tide, the *Rinaldo* proceeded across the bar and up the river, which reportedly was a risky undertaking given that it was not known whether the uncharted river was navigable for a ship of *Rinaldo*'s size and that there was no possibility of getting out, should the British find themselves under attack, before the next tide half a day later.

At 6.15 a.m., as the *Rinaldo* approached the Fort of Selangor at the entrance of the river, the British were fired upon from the fort and the opposite bank of the river. Three men were wounded, and the hull and rig of the *Rinaldo* were damaged, but the British returned the fire, whereupon the fire from the shore stopped. The *Rinaldo* returned with reinforcements the following day and landed at the fort, which they found deserted. Robinson reported:

> We spent the day in utterly destroying this nest of pirates. The town of Salangore is completely burnt down, the forts demolished, the guns spiked and broken up. Had it been possible to make terms with any one, I might have spared the town on the condition that the six pirates . . . should be given up. I would also have inflicted a fine

[115] Robinson to Anson, 6 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 7. The latter instruction is not mentioned by Anson in his summary of the incident to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, although he included Robinson's report; see Anson to Earl of Kimberley, 14 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 1. The precise instructions that Anson gave, first to the Commander of the *Pluto*, E. Bradberry, and the Deputy Commissioner of the Police, George Cox, and later to Captain Robinson seem not to have been preserved or ever supplied to Anson's superiors in London; see Earl of Kimberley to Anson, 6 September 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 17.

[116] Robinson to Anson, 6 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 8.

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to pay for the expenses of this expedition. Failing this, we have done all the damage we could, and it is not likely any act of piracy will take place hereabouts for some time to come.[117]

The expedition also burnt five heavily armed 'piratical prows', before withdrawing and returning to Singapore. Commander Robinson deemed that the object of the expedition had been well accomplished, even though the British had failed to capture the remaining pirates or retrieve any property from the pirated junk.[118]

The course of action taken by Anson met with great approval in the Straits Settlements, although he was questioned, both in the local press and by his superiors in London, for the decision to send in the lightly armed *Pluto* to chase after the pirates. In his defence – which eventually was found to be satisfactory by the Minister of Colonial Affairs – Anson claimed that he had not expected the pirates to be found on board the *Kim Seng Cheong* – nor indeed the junk ever to be found – or the pirates to offer resistance should they be found. He also pointed out that colonial steamers such as the *Pluto* had been used successfully in the past for the purpose of chasing pirates and that it was 'almost entirely by their means that piracy, once so rife in these waters, was put down'.[119]

Shortly afterwards Anson followed up on the *Rinaldo*'s intervention by sending a mission to Selangor, led by the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements, J. W. W. Birch, and seconded by the Auditor-General, C. J. Irving. Birch brought a letter from Anson to the sultan of Selangor, Abdul Samad (r. 1857–98), in which he summarised the course of events from the piracy of the *Kim Seng Cheong* to the destruction of Selangor Fort. He also reminded the sultan of a treaty of 1825 between Great Britain and Selangor in which Abdul Samad's predecessor had promised not to permit any pirates to reside in Selangor, and to seize and return to Penang any offenders, such as pirates, robbers, murderers and others who might escape to Selangor.[120] Referring to the treaty, Anson asked that the sultan seize and deliver the six pirates who remained at large, together with Rajahs Mahdi and Mahmood. He further demanded that the sultan appoint 'some person in the office of Governor or Chief over the country about the Selangor River, whom this Government can trust to carry out the Treaty'.[121]

[117] Ibid., 10. [118] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 83, n. 38.
[119] Anson to Kimberley, 19 October 1871; Kimberly to Anson, 9 December 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 37–8.
[120] Anson to Sultan of Salangore, [July 1871], PP C.466 (1872), 19–20. For the full text of the treaty, see Aitchison (ed.), *Collection of Treaties*, 275–7.
[121] Anson to Sultan of Salangore, [July 1871], PP C.466 (1872), 19–20.

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Sultan Abdul Samad had limited means by which to fulfil the obligations of the 1825 Treaty, regardless of his will to do so. In his younger days, the sultan had been a great warrior and an influential chief, but by the early 1870s his authority had waned, mainly because of the conflict in Klang and, the British believed, because of excessive opium smoking. The sultan thus wielded little actual authority over large parts of his country, including the coast, where the British alleged that the pirates were based.

The British solution for bringing stability to Selangor was that Sultan Abdul Samad transfer de facto power to his son-in-law, Tunku Kudin (Tunku Dhiauddin Zainal Rashid), a nobleman from Kedah, who had had a British education and enjoyed the support of influential British and Chinese businessmen in the Straits Settlements. As an outsider with foreign, European clothes and manners, however, Tunku Kudin had little support among the other notables of Selangor. His followers, consisting of hundreds of Kedah men whom he had brought to Selangor, were viewed with suspicion, and the Sultan feared, already before the British intervention, that Tunku Kudin might try to usurp the throne.[122]

The Straits Government, by contrast, was convinced that Tunku Kudin was the only Malay chief who could be counted on to make a serious effort to suppress piracy and put an end to the civil war in Selangor. British support for him had not wavered even when he, only six months earlier, had been implicated in a piratical act that drew considerable public attention in the Straits Settlements. In December 1870 some of Kudin's followers from Kedah tried to enforce a blockade against Raja Mahdi at the mouth of the Selangor River, when a small schooner from Melaka, the *Sree Singapura*, anchored nearby. Some fifty of Kudin's men pulled out to her in three boats and found her guarded only by a handful of unarmed Indians. They robbed the passengers of their money and valuables of a total value of between about £30 and £40 before returning to the shore. Forty-nine perpetrators were subsequently arrested and put on trial in March 1871. The three leaders were sentenced to between seven and ten years' transportation, and forty-five others who had taken part in the robbery were sentenced to eighteen months' hard labour.[123] In view of the harsh sentences for what seems like a relatively trifling offence, it is remarkable that no shadow was allowed to fall on Kudin.

In order to ensure the success of the mission and to secure the compliance of Sultan Abdul Samad, Anson ordered the Royal Navy's gunboat *Teazer*, with a heavily armed escort on board, to take the colonial secretary with the letter up the Selangor River to the Sultan's residence. Upon entering the river, Birch

[122] Wilkinson, *History of the Peninsular Malays*, 144–5; see further Gullick, 'Tunku Kudin'.
[123] *Straits Times Overland Journal* (20 December 1870; 15, 29 March 1871); Maxwell, *Our Malay Conquests*, 121.

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visited the ruins of Selangor Fort and noted, with obvious satisfaction, that the 'effect of the "Rinaldo's" fire was everywhere visible, not only in the destruction of the forts themselves and the large trees on the top of the hill, but in the general demeanour of the people'. Travelling further up the river, he observed that the women and children of the villages they passed fled into the jungle when they saw the British gunboat, whereas the men came down to the river banks unarmed – 'a very unusual practice for a Malay', according to the secretary.[124]

The British delegation was warmly welcomed by Abdul Samad, who told the British that he had already seized the remaining six pirates and sent them to Melaka. He also declared himself utterly without responsibility for the acts of Rajahs Mahdi and Mahmood and of another nobleman, Syed Mashoor, all of whom he called 'bad men and pirates who had long devastated his country'. The Sultan was not prepared to transfer power to Tunku Kudin, however, saying that he had to consult with his chiefs first, and that if the British would go away he would send a letter to Singapore communicating the result of the consultations. Birch, however, plainly rejected what he saw as a bid by the Sultan to gain time. Instead he told him that he required an answer within twenty-four hours and that any neglect in complying or an unsatisfactory reply would be 'attended by very serious consequences'. With the guns of the *Teazer* pointing at his palace, the Sultan was forced to yield and, at least in theory, transfer power to Tunku Kudin so that he could 'govern and open up' the country, as the British desired.[125]

Tunku Kudin appeared confident that he, with the support of the Straits Government, would shortly be able to establish his authority over all parts of Selangor, a belief he shared with the British. Auditor-General Irving, who was one of Kudin's strongest supporters in the Straits Settlements, lauded his 'intelligence and honesty of purpose'. He compared the disorder in Selangor with the relatively stable and prosperous southern Malay state of Johor, where the East Indian Government, in Irving's words, had 'selected the most intelligent of the Native Chiefs, the present Maharajah, and supported him by their advice and their influence'. Irving anticipated an equally or even more opulent future for the naturally well-endowed country of Selangor, if only security for life and property could be guaranteed.[126] Governor Anson concurred, and at the end of July he reported to London that he was very satisfied with the

[124] Birch to Anson, 26 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 20–23; cit., 20.

[125] Birch to Anson, 26 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 20–23; Power given to Tunku Dia Oodin, by the Sultan (translation); Sultan of Salangore to Birch, 22 July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 24, 23, respectively. Of the six pirates seized by Abdul Samad, one reportedly died on the way, and his hair queue was cut off and sent in proof; Bloomfield to Kellett, 20 September 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 45.

[126] Irving to Anson, July 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 28.

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outcome of the expedition and the transfer of power to Kudin: 'I think the affairs of Salangore are likely henceforth to be far more satisfactorily conducted than they have hitherto been, and the Tunku Dia Ooodin [Kudin] will have a sufficient force at his disposal with the aid of the steamer which he possesses, to prevent the harbouring of pirates in that territory in future.'[127]

The latter formulation was remarkable for two reasons. First, Kudin was entrusted with suppressing piracy in Selangor despite his implication in the recent case of piracy close to the Selangor coast. Second, the attack on the *Kim Seng Cheong*, which had triggered the British intervention in Selangor, was not launched from Selangor but from the vicinity of the British port of Penang, where the perpetrators had boarded the junk disguised as passengers. These perpetrators, moreover, were reportedly Chinese and not Selangor Malays, and their connection to Raja Mahdi or any other Selangor chiefs was not immediately obvious, nor backed by concrete evidence, apart from the circumstance that the junk had been found in Selangor.

Even though the junk had been located and all but one of the alleged perpetrators of the attack had been apprehended, the Straits police had obvious problems in producing tangible evidence against them. At first the pirates were expected to be tried by the Magistrate in Penang, but as essential evidence was lacking the trial was postponed, and the prisoners, on the orders of the colonial government, were transferred to Singapore. The lack of witnesses to the alleged attack hampered the prosecution, and the prisoners were detained for several months awaiting their trial while the police, apparently unsuccessfully, searched for evidence. By October, the Chinese owner of the junk had become tired of waiting for the trial to commence and wished to retire from the prosecution. Around the same time, the *Straits Times*, in an editorial, asked why the prisoners had not yet been brought to justice and deplored the political consequences and the loss of face for the British should the pirates be acquitted for lack of evidence.[128]

The further fate of the suspected pirates and the outcome of the trial are unclear. According to a small notice in the *Straits Times Overland Journal*, they were tried in Penang in late November and convicted, save two who were recommended to mercy.[129] No records of the trial seem to have survived, and no further details have been found in the newspapers or official correspondence.[130] Apparently the outcome of the trial was less than satisfactory from the

[127] Anson to Earl of Kimberley, 28 July 1871 PP C.466 (1872), 18–19; cit., 19.
[128] *Straits Times* (21 October 1871); see also *Straits Times Overland Journal* (23 September 1871), for an attempt by the police to secure evidence against the perpetrators.
[129] *Straits Times Overland Journal* (6 December 1871).
[130] Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 249, came to the same conclusion.

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colonial government's point of view, and the whole affair seems in the end to have been played down by the authorities.

The Aftermath of the Selangor Incident

The news of the British intervention in Selangor reached London at the end of August, and at the beginning of September an extract of Commander Robinson's official report describing the shelling of Fort Selangor and related events was published in *The Times*.[131] A week later, on 13 September 1871, a critical letter to the editor entitled the 'The destruction of Salangore' appeared in the same newspaper, signed by the recently retired Chief Justice of the Straits Settlements, Sir Peter Benson Maxwell. In contrast to the extract from Robinson's report, which only related the immediate events leading up to the destruction of the 'nest of pirates' at Selangor, Maxwell's article placed the events in a somewhat larger context, mentioning also the attack on the junk that had preceded the British intervention.

Maxwell had left the Straits Settlements shortly before the Selangor incident after having served in the colony's judiciary, first as a recorder and then as chief justice, for altogether fifteen years. He was a prominent and outspoken Irish lawyer who believed in the presumed perfections of British justice and saw it as a duty for the British to spread the rule of law among their Asian subjects.[132] During his tenure in the Straits Maxwell had consistently strived to defend the position and integrity of the courts against the executive, which had led to a poisoned relationship between the two branches of the colonial government.[133] As a leading official in the colony, Maxwell was well up on the relations of the Straits Settlements with the neighbouring Malay states and the political situation in Selangor. He was also well acquainted with the problem of piracy in the Strait of Malacca: six months earlier he had presided over the *Sree Singapura* piracy trial and had handed out the harsh sentences to Tunku Kudin's followers.

In his letter to *The Times*, Maxwell sharply criticised Governor Anson for his handling of the affair. The military intervention in Selangor was, in Maxwell's view, an unjustifiable act of war, ordered by an acting governor who had no authority to wage war on a sovereign state. The colonial police, Maxwell maintained, had no more right to arrest a suspected criminal on

[131] *The Times* (5 September 1871). For Robinson's full report, see PP C.466 (1872), 7–10. The report was received by the Colonial Office on 21 August; PP C.466 (1872), 1. Presumably the government had supplied the report to the newspaper for publication.

[132] Turnbull, 'Governor Blundell and Sir Benson Maxwell', 137, 160–1.

[133] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 95; See also Anson, *About Others*, 288–9, for the poisoned relationship between Anson and Maxwell long before the latter's critique in relation to the intervention in Selangor.

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Malay territory than the French police had to arrest a Communist on the streets of London. The proper course of action would instead have been to demand the extradition of the alleged pirates, for which there were well-established procedures and a legal basis in the form of the 1825 treaty between Great Britain and Selangor. Maxwell also lambasted the gunboat diplomacy by which the colonial authorities, assisted by the Royal Navy, had forced Sultan Abdul Samad to appoint Tunku Kudin as his viceroy and thereby taken sides in the conflict in Selangor. The suppression of piracy, according to Maxwell, was a judicial matter and not a legitimate cause for hostilities or interference in the affairs of another state.

The former chief judge also rejected outright the allegation that Selangor was a piratical haunt or that its government or inhabitants would have committed any act of piracy. Quoting the *Straits Times*, he asserted that 'piracy has ceased to exist in the Malay Peninsula as a system', and he believed that there were no longer any *prahus* that were armed and manned as professional pirates – only occasional murders and robberies in the Malacca Straits, which should be handled by legal procedure, not by military interventions. Genuinely outraged, Maxwell concluded the article by condemning the inglorious deployment of modern European ships and artillery against Malay stockades and guns. Such 'unjust and wanton' executions, he wrote, 'can bring only discredit and hatred upon us, and if they are not sternly repudiated by our Government the face of England, in Oriental idiom, will be blackened, and her name will stink'.[134]

Maxwell's letter did not pass unnoticed. On 22 September an answer was published in *The Times*, signed 'A Singaporean' and obviously written by a person with good knowledge of the affairs of the Straits Settlements. The author expressed his support for the action taken by the Straits government and emphasised the severity and persistence of the piracy problem in Selangor. He quoted the *Straits Times* as saying that the 'Malays richly deserved the punishment they have got' and that the 'only way to deal with Malay pirates is to inflict summary punishment upon them'. The newspaper, as quoted by the anonymous letter writer, also called for the 'unqualified sanction of Her Majesty's Government' and opined that it was the government's duty to protect its citizens and commerce from the 'enemies of mankind', regardless of whether they be found on the high seas or in a stronghold located in the territory of a friendly state.[135]

[134] *The Times* (13 September 1871); cf. Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 94–8; Rubin, *Law of Piracy*, 249–54.

[135] *The Times* (22 September 1871). For the original of the quoted passages from the *Straits Times*, see the *Straits Times Overland Journal* (14 July 1871). Maxwell also replied in a second letter in *The Times* (27 September 1871).

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The Times, in an editorial published the same day, declined to take sides in the debate, given the scant information about what had actually happened. The editor, however, expressed his doubts about Maxwell's belief that the 'interesting natives' of Selangor had abandoned their former piratical habits. The editorial noted that the trigger of the incident indisputably was a shocking act of piracy committed against a vessel departing from a British port and probably owned by a British subject, and, as such, 'it became incumbent on the British authorities to take measures accordingly'. It was further noted that the sultan of Selangor, through his son Raja Musa, had granted the British search party the authority to pursue the suspected perpetrators in his territory, although the newspaper was unable to decide whether the violence deployed by the British, which probably involved some loss of innocent life, was really necessary.[136]

The *Straits Times* – which was quoted as an authority on the matter by both Maxwell and his Singaporean opponent – deplored Maxwell's public castigation of the government, even though the paper pointed out that it, in the past, had frequently sided with Maxwell when he, in his capacity as chief judge, had criticised the Straits government. The paper rejected Maxwell's argument that the police had no more right to arrest a suspected pirate in Selangor than the French police had to arrest a Communist in England – even if the law, abstractly, stipulated that the British intercourse with 'these petty Native states which surround us' should be guided by the same principles of form and ceremony as those with 'civilised governments', it was unrealistic to expect the sultan to deliver up the suspected pirates even if he had the will and power to do so. In the present circumstances, according to the paper, the pirates were shielded by 'vassals in open arms against their legitimate ruler' with whom no diplomatic intercourse was possible. The only practical course of action for the government, consequently, was to do what they did, namely to take matters into their own hands:

> The piracy of a junk under British colours in the immediate neighbourhood of our own possessions – the butchery of over thirty men, women, and children – all of them probably our own subjects – are crimes of far too serious a magnitude to permit us to be trammelled with considerations of routine or the claims of Native dignity.[137]

In those circumstances, not taking decisive measures, the newspaper opined, would have made the British look weak and thereby – in contrast to the action taken – done great harm to the reputation of the British in the eyes of their Chinese and Malay subjects.

Maxwell's point of view did not meet with much sympathy from the government in London, whose main worry seemed to be that the intervention

[136] *The Times* (22 September 1871). [137] *Straits Times* (21 October 1871).

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might stir up public opinion and lead to criticism of the government's colonial policy. The intervention in Selangor obviously invited comparisons with James Brooke's and the Royal Navy's (far more brutal) campaigns in north Borneo a quarter of a century earlier, which, as we have seen, had drawn much criticism from humanitarians and radical and liberal opposition groups. Another, more recent, controversy in London over Governor Edward John Eyre's brutal repression of a labour revolt in Jamaica in 1865–66 probably also made the government wary of the risk of being accused of deploying unjust and brutal means to further British interests overseas.[138]

Prime Minister Gladstone, however, was assured by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley (John Wodehouse), that the Sultan's 'apparent approval' of the bombardment of the Fort of Selangor was adequate.[139] Rather than repudiating Anson for the intervention in Selangor, the Colonial Office internally expressed its support for it. The Colonial Secretary, in a despatch to Anson dated 6 September 1871 – that is, before the publication of Maxwell's letter in *The Times* – expressed his 'general approval of the zeal and courage' of all involved in the proceedings and only questioned Anson's decision to dispatch the *Pluto* rather than a warship to search for the pirates in the first instance.[140] The Colonial Office also sent letters to the Admiralty and the War Office expressing the Colonial Secretary's appreciation for the assistance rendered by the Royal Navy and the British soldiers who took part in the action, lauding the 'gallant manner in which the necessary operations were carried out'.[141]

Maxwell's letter nonetheless led Parliament to demand full documentation of the Selangor incident, and the controversy contributed to the adoption of a less interventionist British policy *vis-à-vis* the Malay states over the following years.[142] The plan to give active support to Tunku Kudin in order for him to take control over Selangor was abandoned, leaving the viceroy with little power to assert his authority. The Admiralty, meanwhile, decided that all piracy expeditions henceforth must be approved beforehand by the commander-in-chief of the Far East Station in Hong Kong, unless immediate action was called for and that, under all circumstances, all diplomatic and political affairs be carefully avoided.[143]

[138] See Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy*.
[139] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 95. For criticism of Brooke's intervention in Sarawak, see Tarling, *Britain, the Brookes and Brunei*, 76ff.
[140] Earl of Kimberley to Anson, 6 September 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 17–18; cit., 18.
[141] Colonial Office to Admiralty, 6 September 1871; Colonial Office to War Office, 6 September 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 17.
[142] For the documentation, see PP C.466.
[143] Bloomfield to Kellett, 20 September 1871; Admiralty to Colonial Office, 16 December 1871, PP C.466 (1872), 44.

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Even though there was no official repudiation of the intervention in Selangor, Maxwell's position, that piracy was to be treated as a judicial rather than as a security issue, thus prevailed in practice over subsequent years. The move by Anson and other senior colonial officials in the Straits Settlements to initiate a more interventionist policy with regard to the Malay states thus backfired, and the policy of noninterference was reconfirmed. The outcome was largely a result of Maxwell's angry letter to *The Times*, but it was conditioned by the controversies surrounding the British antipiracy campaigns in north Borneo a couple of decades earlier, as well as the Eyre controversy of the second half of the 1860s.

Strong commercial interests in the Straits Settlements – including British, Chinese and Malay merchants and businessmen – continued, however, to pressure the colonial government to do more to protect British lives, property and trade in the Strait of Malacca and the Malay Peninsula. In July 1872 a petition signed by thirty-four traders in Melaka complained of the lawlessness in Selangor and the British failure to support Tunku Kudin. They also demanded more decisive action on the part of the British authorities to protect trade from 'pirates and robbers' such as Raja Mahdi. The latter, the petitioners observed, was still at large, even though the authorities had had the opportunity to arrest him.[144] Colonial Secretary Birch, however, answered that:

> . . . [I]t is the policy of Her Majesty's Government not to interfere in the affairs of these countries unless where it becomes necessary for the suppression of piracy or the punishment of aggression on our people or territories; and that, if traders, prompted by the prospect of large gains, choose to run the risk of placing their persons and property in the jeopardy which they are aware attends them in these countries under present circumstances, it is impossible for Government to be answerable for their protection or that of their property.[145]

This stance in turn invited a reply from the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in which it was pointed out that the Melaka traders had been induced to invest in Selangor 'upon the faith of the vigorous action of Government in July last year' that measures must be taken to suppress pirates in the area – including preventing Raja Mahdi and his allies from causing trouble – and that support should be given to Tunku Kudin. The Chamber also argued that even if the Melaka traders were motivated by the prospects of large profits, this did not alleviate the government from the duty of protecting them.[146]

[144] Petition of the Malacca Traders to the Chamber of Commerce, Singapore, 27 July 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 5–6; cit., 5.
[145] Birch to Chamber of Commerce, 21 August 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 6.
[146] Chamber of Commerce (W. H. Read) to the Colonial Secretary (Birch), 17 [September] 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 6–7; cit., 7.

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Although Raja Mahdi was widely seen by the British as an evil and cunning pirate chief and the cause of a great deal of the troubles in Selangor, the evidence that he was involved in piratical activities was circumstantial at best. When questioned by the colonial secretary in London over his failure to arrest Raja Mahdi, Governor Harry Ord – who had returned to his post as governor of the Straits Settlements in March 1872 – replied that although he was convinced that the Raja was a 'thoroughly bad man, capable of any treachery', there was no proof that he was guilty of piracy, nor that he was responsible for firing at the *Rinaldo*. The governor, based on his careful review of all the statements about Raja Mahdi in the context of the incident, concluded that the British possessed 'no evidence which could secure his conviction in our courts on any charge that could be preferred against him'.[147]

The attempt to use piracy as a pretext for increasing British influence in Selangor thus failed after the matter was brought to public attention in London. The government feared that the affair might stir widespread controversy, such as that surrounding James Brooke's antipiracy campaigns in the 1840s, and in subsequent years political and military interventions in the Malay states were avoided by the British. The outcome of the Selangor incident demonstrated that there were limits to the use of allegations of piracy to legitimise colonial expansion. Piracy could no longer be credibly constructed as a major security threat in the Strait of Malacca, and the attempt on the part of the colonial government to resecuritise the issue was, in the end, unsuccessful.

Piracy and Civil War in Perak

Shortly after the debacle surrounding the intervention in Selangor had subsided, the focus of attention with regard to piracy in the Strait of Malacca shifted to Perak, to the north of Selangor. Occasional piratical attacks occurred off the Perak coast and affected maritime commerce in and out of Penang. Even though the incidents were relatively few, the colonial government complained about the failure of Perak to apprehend and punish the perpetrators.[148]

In the early months of 1872 conflict over tin-mining rights in Larut began to escalate and spill over into the maritime sphere. Chinese and Malay traders reported piratical attacks or threats of attacks at the mouth of the Larut River to the British authorities in Penang, where Anson was now back as lieutenant-governor after his stint as acting governor. Anson referred the complaints to his superior, Governor Ord, who sent a letter to the local *Mantri* (governor) of Larut, Ngah Ibrahim, asking him to see to it that justice be done. Ord also

[147] Ord to the Earl of Kimberley, 27 October 1872, Correspondence relating to the affairs of certain native states of the Malay Peninsula [Confidential], 3–5; cit., 3, 4, CO 882/2 (TNA).
[148] Jarman (ed.), *Annual Reports*, 673.

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expressly instructed Anson – obviously against the background of the events in Selangor the year before – that he was not to interfere in the administration of justice in Perak.[149]

Ngah Ibrahim's response, however, turned out to be less than satisfactory from the British point of view. He denied the allegations of the Penang traders, which fuelled suspicions among the British that he and his followers were in fact involved in piratical attacks. The British abstained from direct intervention in Larut, but the steamer *Zebra* was sent to patrol the area around the mouth of the Larut River, which seems, at least temporarily, to have brought about a decline in piratical activity in the area.[150]

Over the course of 1872, however, unrest in Perak grew worse, and open conflict over mining rights broke out between two competing Chinese factions, the Sin Heng and the Go Kwan, who between them controlled the mining industry in Larut. Ngah Ibrahim and his followers were driven out of Larut, and both the Sin Heng and the Go Kwan began to plunder any vessel they could lay hands on off the coast.[151] Fighting between the two rival Chinese factions also broke out toward the end of 1872 and during the first half of 1873, fuelled by a great influx of men, vessels and arms from Penang, Singapore and Macau.[152]

In December 1872, the British steamer *Fair Malacca* was attacked by eleven heavily armed junks belonging to the Sin Heng at the mouth of the Larut River. Thirty-five bullets were shot in the hull of the vessel, and a Chinese passenger was shot in the head. The captain and owner of the steamer petitioned to the governor for protection and for legal redress. He pointed out that the 'British flag has been insulted and fired upon by junks manned by British subjects' and that he had been heading for a friendly port in treaty with the British.[153] Governor Ord, however, in a letter to Anson, still rejected the suggestion that the British interfere and argued that the owner had brought the attack on himself:

> I do not find it clearly established from the Petition and the documents which you have attached to it, that this vessel was attacked in the open sea, or under circumstances which would justify a charge of piracy against the junks. The vessel appears to me to have gone on a trading voyage at a time when the petitioners had perfect cognizance of the fact that there was war in the river Laroot, and that they might fairly expect to find their presence obnoxious to one or other of the contending parties.

[149] A. Skinner, Précis of Perak Affairs, 10 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 121.
[150] Ibid., 121. [151] Ibid., 123.
[152] Ord to Earl of Kimberley, 27 July 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 32–3.
[153] Petition, signed R. G. Jeremiah and S. Whate, 17 December 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 22. For further details of the attack, see Statement of R. G. Jeremiah, master of the steam-ship "Fair Malacca", 13 December 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 35–6.

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By proceeding, then, under these circumstances, they have therefore deprived themselves of all claim to protection.[154]

Ord also asked the Solicitor-General, D. Logan, for his opinion as to whether the attack on the *Fair Malacca* could be considered piracy in the legal sense. Citing a leading authority on international law, Logan was of the opinion that the attack could not be defined as piracy because it had not occurred on the high seas but within the jurisdiction of a state.[155]

Two steamers, the *Zebra* and the *Hornet*, were nonetheless dispatched to the mouth of the Larut River to investigate the attack and, if possible, to apprehend the suspected perpetrators. The commander of the *Hornet*, A. D. S. Denison, was careful to explain to the representatives of Ngah Ibrahim and the warring Chinese factions that the British were not taking sides in the conflict and that he had come only as a 'policeman of the seas to seize a pirate', and that had Ngah Ibrahim not been a fugitive and been able to keep order in his own territory, the British would have turned to him for redress.

Bringing a witness to the assault with them, the British boarded several junks suspected of involvement in the assault on the *Fair Malacca*, and identified two of them. One of the suspect junks was reportedly 'full of men well-armed, and with stinkpots at their mast-heads, and boarding-nets ready'. There was also an English ensign on board. The British took the two junks in tow back to Penang, along with a number of their crew, for the purpose of bringing them to justice, although one of the junks sank on the way.[156]

Governor Ord, upon receiving Denison's report, asked the solicitor-general to reconsider his opinion as to whether the attack on the *Fair Malacca* had been a case of piracy that might justify the British intervention and the seizure of the junks. Apparently under pressure from the executive, Logan now opined that because the authority of the Raja of Larut had been superseded and that the junks had no lawful authority or right to commit the attack on the *Fair Malacca*, the British were entitled to send a man-of-war to enquire into the matter and, failing a satisfactory explanation, to take the junks to the nearest British port and bring the suspects to justice. The solicitor-general still refused, however, to call the junks piratical because doing so might 'justify any man-of-war in dealing with them in the most summary manner on the spot'.[157] Logan thus concurred with Maxwell's position that the rule of law should be upheld and that piratical attacks, regardless of where they occurred, be treated as normal crimes and not as security threats.

[154] Petition Respecting Attack on "Fair Malacca", 22–3.
[155] Solicitor-General's Opinion, 22 December 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 24–5.
[156] Denison to Governor, 3 January 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 23–4; cit., 23.
[157] Solicitor-General's Opinion, undated [22–25 December 1872], PP C.1111 (1874), 25.

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The junk that was brought back to Penang was, according to the British, equipped and armed primarily for piracy or other aggressive purposes. It was larger than the usual trading junks in the area and seemed to have come directly from China.[158] Because none of the perpetrators of the attack on the *Fair Malacca* could be identified, however, the trial was cancelled, and all suspects were released upon arrival in Penang.[159] The seized junk was sold and the proceeds – a rather insignificant net sum of $71 – were paid to the Admiralty Court after the owners of the junk had failed to appear to claim the vessel after one year and one day, as prescribed by the law.[160]

Given the dubious legality of the seizure of the junk in Larut and the fresh memory of the debacle over the intervention in Selangor less than two years earlier, the quiet resolution of the affair was a relief both to the Straits Government and the Colonial Office in London. The latter was particularly concerned about the matter in view of a similar case of a seizure of an alleged pirate vessel, the *Telegrafo*, in the West Indies, which recently had resulted in large damages against Crown agents.[161]

The Sin Heng, however, bitterly resented the British intervention because it seemed to them that the British were taking sides in the conflict and supported Ngah Ibrahim.[162] The seizure of the two junks thereby limited the possibilities for the British to mediate and bring an end to the conflict in Larut and the piratical depredations. The conflict continued to escalate over the following months as Chinese fighting men and arms flowed into the area, both directly from China and through the Straits Settlements, particularly Penang. The British issued a ban on the export of arms and ammunitions to Larut, but it was not efficiently upheld.[163] In the middle of 1873, moreover, the fighting spread to Penang itself. On 20 August, Anson telegraphed to Ord: 'If Laroot disturbances not stopped, considered certain serious riots will break out Penang before many days. Can do nothing without man-of-war's boats. Can "Thalia" come here; further complaints of piracies.'[164]

Governor Ord secured the support not only of the *Thalia* but also of the *Midge*, and the two naval vessels undertook a thorough search operation to clear the Larut coast and rivers of pirates. The mission was reportedly 'most ably carried out' and resulted in welcome relief for the small local traders and

[158] Fox to Lieutenant-Governor, Prince of Wales Island, 14 December 1872, PP C.1111 (1874), 34–5.
[159] Ord to Earl of Kimberley, 24 July 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 32–3.
[160] Bradford to Anson, 19 September 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 50.
[161] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 118, n. 37.
[162] Clarke to Earl of Kimberley, 26 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 70.
[163] Ord to Earl of Kimberley, 24 July 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 32–3; Skinner, Précis of Perak Affairs, 123. See also Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 116, on Ord's disapprobation of Anson for his failure to stop the disturbances in Larut.
[164] Cited in Ord to Earl of Kimberley, 21 August 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 43.

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fishermen on the coast, many of whom had not dared to venture out to sea because of the depredations. With regard to the number of suspected pirates who were captured, however, the results were less impressive. The pirates sent their large junks and vessels out to sea and concealed their smaller craft in the many shallow and overgrown bays and creeks along the coast and rivers.[165] Frank Swettenham, a British civil servant who took part in the operation for three weeks, also later described it in less positive terms:

> The duty was an excessively trying one, the men being exposed, without the smallest protection, to the terrible heat of the sun all day, with very often deluges of tropical rain all night . . . It was impossible to land, for the coast was nothing but mangroves and mud, with here and there a fishing village, inhabited, no doubt, by pirates or their friends, but with nothing to prove their complicity. These mangrove flats were traversed in every direction, by deep-water lagoons, and whenever the pirates were sighted, as not infrequently happened, and chase was given, their faster boats pulled away from their pursuers with the greatest ease, and in a few minutes the pirates would be lost in a maze of water-ways, with nothing to indicate which turn they had taken . . . The net result of these excursions was, that about fifty per cent of the crews of the gun-vessels were invalidated, and not a single pirate boat or man had been captured.[166]

Based on the idealised descriptions of the official reports, Governor Ord, on 9 September, told the Legal Council in Singapore that all apprehension of danger from piratical depredations was relieved. A week later, however, two Malay crafts were attacked in the Larut area, and several of their crew members were killed. To the extent that British patrols had any deterrent effect on the pirates, it was obviously highly temporary. The boats of the *Midge* were even fired on in the Larut River, and two officers were wounded. The British retaliated and shelled the stockades from where the fire had come, but the depredations against small local traders continued, as the British warships were unable to catch the small, quick row-boats that the perpetrators used.[167]

There was, among the British, some confusion about the roots and course of the conflict and consequently about the identity of the pirates. As the British understood the situation at the beginning of September 1873, the Sin Heng faction had taken control of the lower parts of Larut, including the coast and river mouths, whereas the Go Kwan controlled the interior of Larut, where most of the tin mines were located. The Sin Heng tried to blockade the interior, but the Go Kwan received supplies through a neutral group of Hokkien Chinese. Large numbers of Go Kwans, who had been driven out of Larut by the Sin Heng, had also taken refuge in Penang, where they threatened to kill

[165] Ord to Earl of Kimberley, 5 September 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 43–4; cit., 44.
[166] Swettenham, *British Malaya*, 125–6.
[167] Skinner, Précis of Perak Affairs, PP C.1111 (1874), 124.

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the brethren of the Sin Heng, should the latter attempt an attack on the Go Kwan.[168] It was, under all circumstances, clear to the British that the piratical activity was closely related to the conflict between the Sin Heng and the Go Kwan, with the perpetrators mostly, or possibly even exclusively, belonging to the former faction.

The situation deteriorated further in November, and the British, despite the presence of several warships in the area, were unable to stop the increasingly bold piratical attacks. In some cases the marauders seem to have fallen out among themselves in quarrels over the booty, and they were reportedly becoming desperate as food, due to the disturbances and the large number of fighting men in the area, was becoming increasingly scarce.[169]

On 10 November a Malay trader was attacked by three piratical row-boats off a British settlement on the island of Pangkor, within sight of the Royal Navy's ship *Avon*, which tried in vain to avert the attack. Six Malays were 'barbarously hacked', in the words of the *Penang Guardian*, and at least two of them subsequently died. The perpetrators escaped in fast row-boats and proceeded to attack another three vessels the same day, murdering most of the crew and carrying off the cargo before making their escape up the Perak River. By mid November, ruthless pirate attacks in which the crews were hacked and hewn to death were a more or less daily occurrence, and the depredations continued throughout 1873 and the beginning of 1874.[170] It was the most serious sustained wave of piratical violence affecting the Straits Settlements since the Chinese junk piracy had come to an end in the late 1850s.

Intervention in Perak

The terrifying accounts of murder and robbery at sea and the negative economic consequences of the conflict in Larut once again began to tip the balance in favour of a more interventionist British policy. The commander-in-chief of the Royal Navy's Far East Station, Vice-Admiral Chas Shadwell, was convinced that such intervention was long overdue:

> The lawless state of affairs in the Laroot district has for some time past been a cause of great trouble and annoyance, seriously interfering with legitimate trade in the Straits of Malacca, and producing excitement and disquietude among the native populations of Penang and Singapore. I have long since foreseen that, sooner or later, it would be

[168] Extract of Legislative Council Proceedings, 9 September 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 73–4.
[169] Skinner, Précis of Perak Affairs, PP C.1111 (1874), 124.
[170] 'Penang "Guardian" Extraordinary', (14 November 1873), CO 882/2 (TNA), 72; Skinner, Précis of Perak Affairs, PP C.1111 (1874), 124.

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absolutely necessary to interfere in a decided manner as soon as a legitimate cause for action should arise. That opportunity has at length occurred.[171]

Public opinion in the Straits Settlements was also strongly in favour of firmer security measures in order to protect the colony's trade and British economic interests in the Malay Peninsula. Virtually all politically significant groups in the colony – British and Chinese businessmen, leading military officers, civil servants and the press – seemed to support interventions in both Perak and Selangor for the purpose of reestablishing law and order. There was also widespread discontent in the colony (and in London) with Governor Ord's allegedly high-handed behaviour and failure to protect British commercial and political interests. Against this background, the news of the replacement of Ord by Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew Clarke, who was reputed to be a man of action and an experienced military officer, was greeted cheerfully. According to the *Straits Times*:

Sir Harry Ord, jealous of his own personal dignity, and too egotistical to learn anything from those who had spent years in the place, and were thoroughly acquainted with the various phases of the petty quarrels that constantly agitate the small native states, chose to draw his own deductions and to mark out a line of policy for himself, by which, instead of developing, he has narrowed, the limits of the trade with the native territories; and by his now notorious declaration that British subjects who venture out of the Colony on trading excursions need expect no protection from their Government, he has effectually checked the enterprise that has been the mainspring of the success of this Settlement as the commercial emporium of the states by which it is surrounded . . .

We earnestly trust that the day for this passiveness is now drawing to a close, and that the line of policy shadowed forth in the speech of Sir Andrew Clarke will shortly be inaugurated; and that instead of sitting still with his hands folded, the Governor of this Colony will, by well-timed, determined intervention, resume his proper position as an arbitrator and mediator between the petty rajahs, and firmly prevent them from paralyzing trade and jeopardizing the lives and property of traders from the Colony.[172]

In November 1873 Clarke was installed as governor of the Straits Settlements. He carried with him a much clearer and more far-reaching mandate for intervention from the Colonial Office in London than any of his predecessors had held. Although the British government – still under Gladstone – did not openly declare its intention to interfere in the Malay states, it had come to the conclusion that some form of intervention was needed in order to protect British interests in the region. In part the new policy had come about as a result of pressure from influential groups of politicians and businessmen in London and the Straits Settlements. As in 1870, there were also worries in

[171] Shadwell to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 27 October 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 58.
[172] *Straits Times* (13 September 1873).

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London that the rising German Empire might seek to establish a foothold in the region.[173]

Clarke's instructions from the colonial secretary were to carefully assess the conditions of each Malay state and report whether any steps could 'properly be taken by the colonial government to promote the restoration of peace and order, and to secure protection to trade and commerce with the native territories'. In particular, the Secretary asked Clarke to consider whether it would be advisable to appoint a British officer to reside in any of the states – a suggestion that, as we have seen, Anson's Committee on Native States had advocated in 1871.[174]

Equipped with these instructions Clarke was in a much stronger position than his predecessor to deal with the unrest in Perak and other Malay states such as Selangor. His appointment marked the beginning of a more thorough British colonisation of the Malay Peninsula, in contrast to the noninterventionist policy of the previous decades. In relation to the conflict in Larut it was also of some consequence that Clarke could distance himself from his predecessor's obviously inefficient policy and the earlier British interventions that had alienated the Sin Heng.[175]

The new governor immediately set to work to bring about a solution to the instability in Perak, and in less than three months, by January 1874, he had managed to bring the fighting among the Sin Heng and the Go Kwan and the contenders in the dynastic struggle to an end by the so-called Pangkor Engagement, which consisted of two separate agreements. One settled the dispute over the throne of Perak, in which one of the main contenders, the British-friendly Abdullah Muhammad Shah, was recognised as the legitimate ruler on condition that he accept a British advisor residing at his court. The other agreement formally ended the conflict between the Go Kwan and the Sin Heng over mining rights in Perak.[176] The combined result was that the piratical depredations swiftly came to an end, and that relative order was reestablished in Larut, although rivalry and sporadic clashes between the two Chinese societies continued in the following years.

The success of Clarke's initiative to end acts of piracy in Perak was above all achieved through mediation and appeasement, backed up by unmistakable threats of violence. The peace negotiations were facilitated, Clarke believed, by a weariness on both sides of the ruinous struggle, which had already cost thousands of lives and which threatened to intensify over the coming months

[173] Tarling, 'The Establishment of the Colonial Régimes', 28–9.
[174] Earl of Kimberley to Clarke, 20 September 1873, PP C.1111 (1874), 38–9; cit., 39.
[175] Pickering to Governor, 5 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 153–4. See further Parkinson, *British Intervention*, 119–20, on Clarke's reversal of his predecessor's policies and leadership.
[176] See Wilkinson, *History of the Peninsular Malays*, 115–22, for a summary of the Pangkor Treaty and the conditions surrounding its establishment.

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due to the arrival of more junks and men from China, particularly on the side of the Go Kwan.[177] The Sin Heng were in a tight spot, pressured not only by the Go Kwan, but also by the Royal Navy on the coast and by a blockade on land, led by the former superintendent of police in Penang, Tristram (Captain) Speedy, an eccentric adventurer and explorer who commanded a contingent of 110 Punjabis and Pathans brought to Larut from India to deal with the upheaval.[178]

For the British the object of the Pangkor Engagement was to reestablish law and order in Perak and to create favourable conditions for trade and economic development, while at the same time keeping British military commitments and costs to a minimum. Restoring law and order, Clarke hoped, would provide those responsible for the piracy and fighting with alternative sources of livelihood. He also believed that without the negotiation of a sustainable peace between the Sin Heng and the Go Kwan, there would be no end to the piratical depredations and the anarchy in Larut.[179] The first priority was thus to convince the Sin Heng to stop their acts of piracy. To this effect, Clarke sent Mr Pickering, an interpreter and junior colonial official who was fluent in Chinese and who commanded the respect of both the Go Kwan and the Sin Heng, to Larut. The headmen of the hard-pressed Sin Heng proved easy to convince and, according to Pickering, even pleaded with the British to take over the country.[180] On 4 January, Pickering telegraphed to Singapore: 'SINHENGS gladly sign agreement; give boats, everything to your disposal in seven days, meantime beg orders; Speedy to hold his hand. Boats being given up they cannot escape death; agreement broken, then let Speedy do his worst.'[181]

Upon receiving the telegram, Clarke immediately sent the steamer *Johore* to Larut and began to distribute food to the starving Sin Hengs. He also arranged for the Chinese headmen to bring their row-boats and arms to the Dinding Islands – supposedly a well-known pirate haunt off the coast of Perak – ten days later. There Clarke received them in person and oversaw the signing of the two agreements of the Pangkor Engagement. Steamers with plenty of food on board took the disarmed Chinese to Penang or Singapore, where the government was to provide them with temporary work until the mines could be reopened.[182] Meanwhile, steamers were sent into the rivers to raze the stockades, and Speedy, who reportedly was generally respected by all parties to the conflict, was appointed resident to Larut in order to assist the local

[177] Clarke to Earl of Kimberley, 26 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 70.
[178] Gullick, 'Captain Speedy of Larut', 34–6.
[179] Clarke to Earl of Kimberley, 26 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 70–1.
[180] Pickering to Governor, 5 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 153–4.
[181] Pickering to Government, 4 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 74; see also Pickering to Governor, 5 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 153–4, for the full report of the negotiations.
[182] Birch to Pickering, 5 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 74.

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government in restoring order.[183] As the head of a 'Residency Guard' of about 185 men, he was charged with the responsibility of disarming the remaining combatants, including large numbers of fighting men who had been recruited and brought from China by the warring sides in preceding years.[184]

In view of the protracted unrest in Perak over the preceding two years, the object of restoring a reasonable level of peace and order and suppressing piracy was achieved within a remarkably short period of time, and Governor Clarke was complimented in the Straits Settlements for devising and implementing the successful scheme.[185] Aside from Clarke's personal role, three aspects of the policy stand out as instrumental for its success. First, the superior military power of the British was used not so much to chase after the pirates or destroy their vessels and land bases as to put pressure on the warring sides, particularly the Sin Heng, who were responsible for most of the piratical depredations. As in other examples of gunboat diplomacy, the threat of violence served as a strong incentive to accept British peace proposals.

Second, several of the old hands among the officials of the Straits Settlements played key roles in the negotiations, and many of them possessed a relatively good understanding of the social, political and cultural context in Perak and the other Malay states. Clarke was seconded in the negotiations by Auditor-General C. J. Irving and Attorney-General Thomas Braddell, both of whom had long served in the colony and had substantial knowledge of local affairs.[186] Braddell, who was also reputedly an amateur scholar of Malay history and culture, was central in the forging of the Pangkor Engagement.[187] In the negotiations with the warring Chinese factions, the role of the interpreter Pickering likewise stands out as crucial.

Third, the suppression of piracy was achieved by means of amnesty and appeasement combined with immediate disarmament rather than by the deployment of violence. There was no attempt to hold the perpetrators of the atrocities of the preceding years to account, and they were offered immediate relief from their dire situation in the form of food supplies and government employment in return for giving up their arms and boats.

[183] Clarke to Earl of Kimberley, 26 January 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 85–6.
[184] Gullick, 'Captain Speedy of Larut', 38, 41.
[185] E.g., 'The Straits of Malacka', *The Times* (London), 11 March 1874.
[186] Parkinson, *British Intervention*, 119.
[187] See Makepeace, 'Concerning Known Persons', 425; Parkinson, *British Intervention*, 120. The appointment of J. W. W. Birch, who spoke neither Malay nor Chinese and was widely perceived as both arrogant and ignorant of local customs, as resident to Perak, on the other hand, was later regretted by Clarke and eventually ended in the murder of the deeply unpopular resident; see Anson, *About Others*, 323, quoting a letter from Clarke, where he expressed his annoyance over Birch's performance as resident. Birch's murder in November 1875 subsequently triggered the Perak War (1875–6), but piracy was not a prominent part of that conflict.

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By thus employing qualified interpreters and negotiators who had an understanding of the culture, language and society of the opposing sides, and by combining the threat of violence – gunboat diplomacy in other words – with positive incentives, the British were able to bring a swift end to piratical activity and unrest in Perak, at least for the time being.

'The Most Daring and Bloodthirsty of All'

While the disturbances in Perak were developing in 1872–74, conditions in Selangor continued to be unstable, but in contrast to Perak there were very few reports of piratical activities emanating from Selangor during the two years after the incident in mid 1871. At the end of 1873, however, a brutal attack on a small Malay trading boat off the mouth of the Jugra River in Selangor gained widespread attention, not only in the colonial press, but also in leading metropolitan newspapers such as the London *Times* and the *New York Times*.[188] The details of the attack were unusually detailed due to the testimony of a member of the crew, a Malay named Mat Syed, who survived the attack.

According to Mat Syed, their boat left Bandar Langat on Selangor on the morning of 16 November with a crew of six Malays, including the skipper and owner of the boat, and three Chinese passengers, plus a cargo of rattan and $2,000 in specie.[189] Around noon they called on the stockade at the mouth of the Jugra River, which was occupied by a son of Sultan Abdul Samad, Raja Yakob, and his followers. The traders showed their pass and proceeded about a mile out to sea, where they anchored and waited for a favourable wind. Around five o'clock they saw two boats with some twenty men that set out from the stockade and headed in the direction of the anchored boat. Mat Syed asked the skipper who they were, and he replied that they were friendly boats from the stockade. The two boats came alongside and four or five men, including the leader, a Malay named Musa, came on board, saying they were about to go fishing. They talked amicably for a while, but as dusk began to set in, around six o'clock, Mat Syed heard shots being fired from the two boats, probably killing the skipper. Musa called out for his followers to run 'amok' – a traditional martial tactic used in the Malay world, consisting of a surprise attack and the frenzied, wholesale massacre of the enemy.[190] The aggressors shot or stabbed all the members of the crew and the three passengers, with the exception of Mat Syed, who escaped by jumping into the water and concealing himself under the boat, holding on to the rudder. After dark he let go of the

[188] *The Times* (25 May 1874); republished in *New York Times* (14 June 1874).
[189] The narration is based on the testimony that Mat Syed gave at the trial, published in McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, 283–6.
[190] See Spores, *Running Amok*, 20–7.

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rudder and quietly floated to the shore, where he hid under the jetty of the stockade. About an hour later the attackers landed with the pirated vessel. Mat Syed heard a man, who came out from the stockade, ask the pirates if it was all over (*Sudah habis?*), to which they replied affirmatively, adding that they were taking the property to Tunku Allang, a nickname for Raja Yakob. The pirates then went up the river in their boats with the pirated boat in tow. They returned about an hour later without the latter boat.

With the help of a Bugis boat that was anchored close to the jetty, Mat Syed was able to reach Langat and eventually Melaka. By chance, around three weeks later, Mat Syed saw some of the pirates and identified them to the police, who arrested nine men altogether. Mat Syed also claimed that some of the plundered property – an anchor, a sarong and some weapons – was on board the boats of the arrested men.

While the alleged perpetrators of the Jugra River piracy were thus in custody, another maritime raid, believed to have been launched from the same part of the Selangor coast, occurred. On 11 January the lighthouse at Cape Rachado (Tanjung Tuan), which the British had constructed in 1863, was attacked by a small party of men who were suspected to be followers of Raja Mahmood, a Selangor chief who, together with Raja Mahdi, had been implicated in the attack on the *Kim Seng Cheong* in 1871. The raid on the lighthouse was in itself trifling: the raiders seem to have had their minds set on the monthly payroll for the staff of the lighthouse, less than a hundred dollars in total, but they were chased away by the light-keeper, armed with a carbine, before they were able to lay their hand on any plunder.[191]

Despite the minor nature of the incident, however, it was quickly seized upon by the Straits authorities. The assault on the lighthouse was useful because it could be represented as an affront to British pride and to the efforts of the British to bring progress and civilisation to the region. For the colonial authorities the attack, combined with the Jugra River piracy two months earlier, was aptly timed because, with order restored in Perak, they were able to turn their full attention to Selangor. As in Perak, and in accordance with his instructions from London, Governor Clarke envisioned an arrangement with a permanent British resident to Selangor.

The attempted raid on the lighthouse also nearly coincided with the arrival in the Strait of Malacca of the commander of the China Squadron of the Royal Navy, Vice-Admiral Shadwell, who brought an unusually large concentration of men-of-war to the area. Clarke requested the assistance of the squadron for the purpose of intervening in Selangor in order to put a stop to the civil unrest and the piratical activity. Using a highly securitising rhetoric, the governor said

[191] Parkinson, *British Intervention*, 143; for the full report, including testimonies, of the attack, see PP C.1111 (1874), 99–103.

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that 'these attacks have at last reached a point when they are threatening the peaceful navigation of the Straits, the great highway between Europe and China'.[192] Attorney-General Thomas Braddell threw in his weight as a reputed expert on the Malay world, describing Selangor as a particularly dangerous and pirate-infested part of the archipelago:

> The Salangore pirates are distinguished in the Malayan seas as the most daring and bloodthirsty of all. They are said to be supported by nobles, and even by members of the Royal Family, and are led by men of rank, of Bugghese descent, who are superior in warlike qualities to the ordinary Malayan Chiefs.
>
> . . .
>
> The coasts of Salangore are peculiarly well situated as a refuge and haunt for pirates . . . The numerous rivers, great and small, between the Salangore and Lingie Rivers, afford shelter for pirates, who have stockaded defences up the creeks, from which they sally forth to attack the boats which pass close to their stations, making for the Calang Straits. When their work is done, the pirates retire to their strongholds, which are out of sight, and, practically, out of reach of the men-of-war cruizing in these seas.
>
> . . .
>
> The piratical practices at Salangore differed from those in other parts of the peninsula, in this; that they were continuous, well organized, and more daringly carried out; showing that they were not, as in other places, caused by temporary difficulties in the country, and ceasing with those difficulties, but were the result of long-continued lawlessness in the people, and protected, if not caused, by persons of rank in the country.[193]

In February 1874 Clarke, accompanied by Shadwell and a number of senior colonial officials, headed for Abdul Samad's capital at Langat on board the *Pluto* and followed by three men-of-war. The purpose of the expedition was to make the sultan cooperate with the British in the suppression of piracy, including seizing Raja Yakob and other suspected pirate chiefs and destroying all their stockades along the Selangor River. In addition, however, the unofficial purpose was to make the sultan agree to have a British resident appointed to his court.[194]

Arriving at the capital the British found the Sultan's palace heavily fortified with big guns and 'covered with some hundreds of very villainous-looking Malays armed to the teeth', according to Clarke.[195] The impression conjured

[192] Clarke to Shadwell, 1 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 92–3; cit., 92.

[193] Braddell, Continuation of Report on the Proceedings of Government relating to the Native States in the Malay Peninsula, 18 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 184–95; cit., 185–6. On Braddell's reputation as an expert on Malay history and culture, see Makepeace, 'Concerning Known Persons', 425–6.

[194] Clarke to Shadwell, 1 February 1871, PP C.1111 (1874), 92–3.

[195] Quoted in Makepeace, 'Concerning Known Persons', 426.

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sat well with British expectations of Langat as the headquarters of the vicious Selangor pirates and of the royal family as 'thoroughgoing pirates'.[196]

Sultan Abdul Samad, for his part, apparently believed that the British had come with their gunboats to seize and imprison him and his sons and to install Tunku Kudin as sultan. After an initial tense standoff, however, the sultan agreed to come on board the *Pluto*, where he was reportedly well treated, and negotiations followed over the following days.[197]

Piracy was one of the main items on the agenda of the British, but the sultan was obviously less concerned with the problem than the British. At one point he told Braddell with regard to piracy off the Selangor coast: 'Oh! those are the affairs of the boys (meaning his sons), I have nothing to do with them.'[198] This attitude conformed with British expectations and understanding of traditional Malay culture, as demonstrated, for example, by Governor Clarke's characterisation of Malay piracy as 'bona fide' (in good faith), in contrast to the piracies committed by the Chinese in Perak.[199]

Regardless of the Sultan's good faith, the British were adamant that he and his chiefs should understand the importance of committing themselves to combat piracy. On his second meeting with the sultan, Clarke raised the 'unpleasant' subject of piracy and explained that the piratical acts emanating from Selangor risked bringing down the 'reprobation of the whole civilized world' on the sultan. It must be apparent to him as a ruler of his country, Clarke said, that these acts of piracies must cease and that it was clearly in the Sultan's own interest that this be achieved. Clarke called on Abdul Samad to take every possible measure to end piracy in Selangor and offered the assistance of British warships for the purpose. According to Braddell, who was present at the meeting, the governor's address appeared to make a deep impression on those present, many of whom, in the attorney-general's view, doubtless saw it as foreshadowing the end of their careers as pirates.[200]

In addition to securing the cooperation of Sultan Abdul Samad in suppressing piracy, the British expedition had a further concrete purpose in relation to it, namely to persuade the sultan to hold a trial of the suspected perpetrators of the Jugra River piracy in Selangor. There were two reasons for holding

[196] Clarke to Anson, 16 February 1874, quoted in Sadka, 'The Residential System in the Protected Malay States, 1874–1895', 79.

[197] Braddell, Continuation of Report on the Proceedings of Government relating to the Native States in the Malay Peninsula, 18 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 189.

[198] Sultan as quoted by Braddell; insertion in brackets in original; Continuation of Report, 18 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 194.

[199] Clarke to Shadwell, 1 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 92.

[200] Braddell, Continuation of Report, 18 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 193–4.

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the trial in Selangor rather than in a British port. First, Governor Clarke feared that a British court might order the release of the suspected pirates because the crime had taken place outside British jurisdiction. Second, he was of the opinion that any punishment inflicted by a British court and in British territory, far removed from the sight and knowledge of the pirates' fellow countrymen and associates, would not have any permanent deterrent effect.[201] Clarke thus hoped to be able to set an example by prosecuting and punishing the pirates in their own homeland.

The trial was held immediately after Clarke had returned to Singapore, in mid February 1874. Tunku Kudin presided over the negotiations, which were also attended by two British commissioners appointed by Clarke: a respected Singapore lawyer named J. G. Davidson and John McNair. Both were good Malay speakers with firsthand knowledge of the Malay world, and had a reputation for integrity. Their instructions were to assist the court, which apart from Tunku Kudin and the two Britons consisted of three local notables, in order to secure a full and fair enquiry. The British officials were not to take any active part in the trial itself, although in the end Davidson, in particular, came to play a prominent role in the proceedings. The outcome of the three-day trial was that all of the eight accused pirates were convicted, and all but one, a teenager who was pardoned, were executed. Sultan Abdul Samad, to the satisfaction of the British, insisted that he provide the kris with which the punishment was effected. The trial and the executions thus appeared to show that the salutary effect that Clarke had intended had been achieved.

The trial, however, suffered from several structural weaknesses, and it is uncertain if those who were executed were in fact responsible for the Jugra River piracy. Frank Swettenham, who served as an assistant-resident and resident to Selangor for several years, later came to the conclusion that those executed were not so responsible and that the actual perpetrators remained at large. Moreover, the court found no evidence of the involvement of Raja Yakob, even though he was widely believed to have been the instigator of the piratical attack and was, in Braddell's view, a 'lawless cruel Chief'.[202]

[201] Clarke to Earl of Kimberley, 24 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 181.

[202] Gullick, 'Kuala Langat Piracy Trial'; Swettenham, *British Malaya*, 184; cit. Braddell, Continuation of Report, 18 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 194–5. Raja Yakob was heard at the trial but succeeded in dissociating himself from his followers, who stood accused of piracy and murder, and the court found that there was no evidence that they had acted on the orders of Raja Yakob; see Minute of the Proceeding of a Court held at Qualla Jugra, 13–15 February 1874, PP C.1111 (1874), 208.

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The End of Piracy in the Straits Settlements

Piracy was an important part of the official rhetoric used to justify the intervention and extension of British influence in both Perak and Selangor at the beginning of 1874. The new policy was met with great approval, above all in the Straits Settlements, but also in London. As in 1871, however, there were critical voices. For example, a motion was presented in the House of Lords to reject Clarke's policy in the Malay Peninsula, although it was not adopted by the House.[203]

The nemesis of the Straits Government, Peter Benson Maxwell, also once again came forward to criticise the intervention and to question the colonial government's allegations of piracy. In a pamphlet entitled *Our Malay Conquests*, published in 1878, he wrote:

> The Parliamentary Books of 1872 and 1875, are so full of general assertions about piracy in the Straits, that they give the reader the impression that the Malay States of the Peninsula were little better than nests of pirates . . . Two States are especially singled out for this bad eminence, Perak and Salangore. I read all those general statements with wonder, for I had filled a judicial office in the Straits Settlements for fifteen years without hearing of those formidable pirates or their misdeeds; and after searching the Parliamentary papers and other sources for information, I have no hesitation in asserting that the accusation is unfounded.[204]

With regard to Selangor, Maxwell found that there had been but three cases of piracy in the years preceding the Jugra River incident: the attack on the *Kim Seng Cheong* in 1871 – which, as we have seen, seems to have been committed by passengers who boarded the vessel from a British port and did not emanate directly from Selangor; the abortive raid on the Cape Rachado lighthouse in early 1874; and an attack on a small schooner from Melaka, also in the beginning of 1874, in which no one was injured or killed.[205]

Like his article in *The Times* in the aftermath of the Selangor incident, Maxwell's book was not well received in the Straits Settlements, where Clarke's interventionist policies were broadly popular. The *Straits Times* criticised Maxwell for being one-sided and unfair to Clarke and the other colonial officials responsible for the intervention The newspaper was also of the opinion that Maxwell had already been proven wrong by the stark contrast between the previous disorder in Perak and the present peaceful conditions.[206]

There were few piratical attacks in the vicinity of the Malay Peninsula during the remainder of the British colonial period up until the Japanese

[203] Cowan, *Nineteenth-Century Malaya*, 204. [204] Maxwell, *Our Malay Conquests*, 119.
[205] Ibid., 122.
[206] *Straits Times Overland Journal* (11 April 1878). The British intervention in Perak led to the Perak War of 1875–76, however, in which Britain was directly involved.

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occupation of Malaya in 1942. A rare case occurred in May 1884, however, when a small *tongkang* (light wooden boat) anchored off Singapore was attacked by five Malays, who killed five Chinese crew members and seriously wounded another. While loading off their booty, which consisted of some sacks of rice, they were spotted by a harbour pilot, Captain Davies, who was on his way to meet the incoming steamer *Glengarry*. Believing that the pirates were about to board his steam launch, Davies rammed the pirate boat and sank it. The pirates made it to a nearby reef, where they were arrested on the orders of a local Malay headman. The latter then headed for Singapore with his followers in three boats to deliver their captives to the police, but upon approaching the *Glengarry* the boats were fired upon by the crew, who believed that they were being attacked by pirates. The boats turned away and made it to Singapore to deliver the men. Although he received an apology, the headman was reportedly very indignant at the treatment he had received from the steamer and especially for being mistaken for a pirate.[207] The incident caused great excitement in the British colony because it was the first serious case of piracy in the vicinity of Singapore for a long time. The five perpetrators were sentenced to death for murder and executed by hanging at the beginning of August.[208]

The last major act of piracy in the vicinity of British Malaya before the end of the colonial era seems to have been an attack on a Chinese junk off Johor in 1909. A group of Malay and Chinese pirates robbed and killed five people and seriously injured four others, and made off with a small amount of cash and valuables.[209] Three of the perpetrators were arrested and sentenced to death, but for judicial reasons the verdict was altered to penal servitude for life, reportedly to the regret of the accused, who would rather have been put to death.[210] The case received some attention in the press, both in the Straits Settlements and other colonies and in London, but the colonial authorities, obviously embarrassed by the negative publicity that the incident brought to the colony, tried to tone down the importance of the affair.[211]

Piracy and the Aceh War

In the southern and western parts of the Strait of Malacca piratical activity receded after the Dutch strengthened their control over the Riau Archipelago around the middle of the nineteenth century. The sporadic acts of piracy that nevertheless continued and were reported by the Dutch colonial authorities

[207] *Straits Times* (6 May 1884, 14 May 1884).
[208] *Straits Times Weekly Issue* (23 July 1884; 6 August 1884).
[209] Brooke, 'Piracy', 299–300; *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (12 April 1909).
[210] *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (5 August 1909).
[211] Cf. *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (3 June 1909).

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happened mainly along the east and west coasts of the middle of Sumatra, between the Dutch colonial territory in the south and the Sultanate of Aceh in the north.[212]

In 1858 the Dutch took control over the Sultanate of Siak and its dependencies in the middle of Sumatra, leaving Aceh as the last significant indigenous power on the island. To the Dutch, Aceh was reputed to be a nest of pirates. Like elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago, the piratical inclinations of the Acehnese were linked to their adherence to Islam, which combined with the country's geographical position to make it a particularly prominent hotbed of piracy. According to the leading Dutch authority on the history and culture of the Acehnese in the nineteenth century, Christian Snouck Hurgronje:

> From Mohammedanism (which for centuries she is reputed to have accepted) she really only learnt a large number of dogmas relating to hatred of the infidel without any of their mitigating concomitants; so that the Achehnese made a regular business of piracy and man-hunting at the expense of the neighbouring non-Mohammedan countries and islands, and considered that they were justified in any act of treachery or violence to European (and latterly to American) traders who came in search of pepper, the staple product of the country. Complaints of robbery and murder on board ships trading in Achehnese parts thus grew to be chronic.[213]

In line with this characterisation of the Acehnese, Dutch colonial officials tended to see Aceh as a robber state (*roofstaat*), and they believed that the sporadic piracy that occurred along the east and west coasts of Sumatra, mainly to the south of Aceh, was committed by Acehnese.[214] There was very little piratical activity around the Acehnese coast for most of the 1860s and early 1870s, however, and in 1871 a Dutch gunboat, which cruised the northeast coast of Sumatra and visited several places on the Acehnese coast, reported that a 'desirable tranquillity' reigned everywhere.[215]

When the Dutch in 1873 decided to invade Aceh, piracy was thus not a credible *casus belli*. In fact, the piratical activity that still occurred along the east coast of Sumatra seemed mainly to reflect badly on the colonial authorities rather than on Aceh. One of the detractors of the Aceh War in the Netherlands, the lawyer and writer John Eric Bancks, for example, argued that because the colonial authorities to date had not been able to suppress piracy efficiently in the Dutch East Indies, it was unreasonable to demand that Aceh should succeed where the colonial authorities had failed.[216] The liberal colonial

[212] à Campo, 'Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity', 55.
[213] Snouck Hurgronje, *Achehnese*, 1, vii–viii.
[214] à Campo, 'Patronen, processen en periodisering', 104; à Campo, 'Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity', 55.
[215] à Campo, 'Patronen, processen en periodisering', 99, 104; *Java-bode* (11 July 1873).
[216] Banck, *Atchin's verheffing en val*, 53–4.

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newspaper *Java-bode* went even further in its criticism of the authorities. The paper argued that the Dutch failure to suppress piracy around the coasts of Sumatra violated the terms of a treaty concluded between Aceh and the Netherlands in 1857, which obliged both parties to cooperate in the suppression of piracy, thereby actually providing the sultan of Aceh with a *casus belli* against the Dutch.[217]

The main reason for the Aceh War was thus not piracy or maritime raiding, but to prevent other colonial powers from settling on Sumatra. By the early 1870s, moreover, pressure to invade was mounting from Dutch businessmen who were jealous of Aceh's flourishing pepper trade with Penang. Consequently, even Snouck Hurgronje, who, as we have seen, had no doubts about the long-standing piratical character of the Acehnese, admitted that the suppression of piracy and the slave trade was but an auxiliary reason for the Dutch decision to invade Aceh. Paradoxically, piracy thus played a subordinate role in the outbreak of the Aceh War, despite the well-established colonial image of Aceh as a pirate or robber state.[218]

The attempted Dutch invasion in 1873 met with fierce resistance from the Acehnese and soon turned into a protracted guerrilla war that was to go on for more than three decades. There were worries from the outset among the Dutch that the war itself might trigger a resurgence in piracy, particularly after three minor piratical incidents were reported in the vicinity of Aceh shortly after the Dutch attack in 1873. As in most instances the main victims were small local traders. The three attacks, however, were not followed by a major resurgence in piracy along the Acehnese coast, although sporadic attacks occurred, such as in 1876, when a small Chinese-owned junk based in Penang, *Sin Soon Seng*, was brutally attacked and looted off the coast of Pulau Weh in Aceh.[219]

More serious piratical activity began to occur only in the 1880s and the 1890s, after the Dutch began to enforce a selective blockade of the coasts of Aceh as part of a more offensive war strategy.[220] Many of the attacks against small local vessels either went unreported or failed to attract much attention, but a number of spectacular attacks against steamships owned or commanded by Europeans did gain widespread public attention, both in the Dutch East Indies and in the Straits Settlements.

The first of these attacks occurred in 1883, when the British steamer *Nisero* ran aground near Panga on the west coast of Aceh. The local district chief (*ulèëbalang*), Teuku Imam Muda of Teunom, reportedly saw the grounded

[217] *Java-bode* (19 March 1873).
[218] Missbach, 'Aceh War', 43; Trocki, 'Political Structures', 100–1. See further Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*, 91–7, for the immediate motives.
[219] *Java-bode* (19 March 1873, 17 April 1873); Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, 113–14.
[220] à Campo, 'Asymmetry, Disparity and Cyclicity', 59.

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vessel as a gift from God. He seized the ship's cargo of sugar and took the twenty-nine crew members, most of whom were British, hostage. Pressured by the British, the Dutch authorities tried but failed to free the hostages, and the crew was only released ten months later, after a substantial ransom had been paid to Teuku Imam.[221]

In 1886, a more brutal attack occurred at Rigas, also on the west coast of Aceh. On 14 June the Penang-based steamer *Hok Canton* was attacked by forty Acehnese, who boarded the ship, which was at anchor to conduct business with the local headman, Teuku Umar. The attackers, who were followers of Teuku Umar, tried to seize the European officers on board, and two of them, a German mate and the Scottish engineer, were killed when they tried to defend themselves. The Danish captain was wounded and died in captivity a few days later from lack of medical care. After plundering the ship, the pirates brought the captain's wife, a British second engineer and six Malay crew members to shore, where they were held hostage for almost three months. The Dutch, once again unsuccessfully, tried to free the hostages, and they too were released only after a ransom had been paid at the beginning of September.[222]

Despite the brutality of the attack and the fact that one British officer was killed and another taken prisoner, the Straits government tried to downplay the issue, possibly because the *Hok Canton* was not registered in the British colony, although the owner was based in Penang.[223] More importantly, however, the British had no desire to get mixed up in the conflict in Aceh, which was outside the British sphere of interest according to the Anglo–Dutch treaties concluded in 1870–71. Details of the piracy and the subsequent efforts to have the hostages released were reported in the colonial press in the Straits Settlements, but, compared with the public outrage in connection with the acts of piracy off Perak and Selangor in the previous decade, there was relatively little interest in the activity emanating from Aceh.[224]

Attacks on British vessels continued over the following years.[225] The most brutal incident took place in July 1893, when the *Rajah Kongsee Atjeh*, a steamer owned by the same company that owned the *Hok Canton*, was attacked off the east coast of Aceh. The attack was perpetrated by eight Acehnese, one of whom was a member of the crew, while the other seven were passengers who boarded the vessel in the port of Idi on the east coast of

[221] Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*, 218–49.
[222] Snouck Hurgronje, *Achehnese*, 2, 113, n. 1; Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*, 261–2.
[223] Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*, 261.
[224] For example, in November the *Penang Gazette* lamented the fact that there was no collection to support John Fay, one of the hostages who had arrived in Penang after being released; *Straits Times Weekly Issue* (29 November 1886).
[225] Kruijt, *Atjeh-oorlog*, 51; Reid, *Contest for North Sumatra*, 268–9, n. 2.

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Aceh. The attackers killed most of the other crew members, including the English captain and his mate, and several passengers. In all, twenty-four people were killed and another twenty drowned when they tried to escape in an overcrowded boat that capsized. The pirates made off with 5,000 Dutch guilders in cash and eight hostages.[226]

The attack was, as the *Straits Times* put it, 'one of the most disastrous cases of piracy that has occurred for many years in Eastern waters'. The paper, however, did not believe that the incident had any political significance but that it was motivated mainly by the desire for plunder. However, the paper thought that it was possible that the attack had been 'indirectly and remotely' a result of the combative spirit that had been fostered among the Acehnese by twenty years of military resistance to the Dutch. There was also a racial side to the problem, according to the *Straits Times*. The *Rajah Kongsee Atjeh*, like other cargo steamers in the region, was in the custom of taking on board large numbers of Asian passengers. With most crew members being Asian as well, the Europeans on board were generally greatly outnumbered, a circumstance that the newspaper believed was a potential security problem. Because it was not possible, on account of the construction of the steamers, to confine Asian passengers to the lower deck, it was all the more necessary to make them understand that piracy was an 'unforgiveable offence' that would surely lead to capital punishment.[227]

The last major attack in Acehnese waters occurred in 1897, when the British steamer *Pegu* was attacked in a similar manner to the *Rajah Kongsee Atjeh*, an incident that left three British officers and five Asian crew members dead.[228] Thereafter piratical activity subsided as the Aceh War came to an end in the first years of the twentieth century.[229]

Summary

Maritime raiding was a central part of the political dynamic of the Strait of Malacca and maritime Southeast Asia in precolonial times, and a coastal ruler's power depended largely on his or her ability to enlist the support of large raiding fleets. In times of political decentralisation and upheaval, piracy and maritime raiding tended to increase and become dispersed, as happened after the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511. The arrival of the Portuguese

[226] *Straits Times* (28 July 1893); *Java-bode* (31 July 1893).

[227] *Straits Times Weekly Issue* (25 July 1893). In southern China, Chinese passengers on river steamers were confined to the lower deck and separated from other parts of the vessel by iron fences and armed guards in order to prevent pirates disguised as passengers from committing robberies and murders; e.g., Eklöf Amirell, 'Tools of Terror', 187–90.

[228] *The Times* (10 August 1897).

[229] à Campo, 'Patronen, processen en periodisering', 104–5; cf. Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, 115.

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in Southeast Asia brought about an increase in maritime violence and raiding, perpetrated both by Portuguese and Malays. As in the Indian Ocean, the onset of European expansion thus led to a deterioration in maritime security, particularly for Asian seafarers and coastal communities. The arrival of the Dutch from the turn of the seventeenth century resulted in a further increase in maritime violence and coercion, and triggered a long-term decline for indigenous traders and producers of spices and other commercial commodities.

From the turn of the eighteenth century – at around the same time that England began actively to try to shed its worldwide reputation as a nation of pirates – the Dutch East India Company began to take increasingly decisive measures against piracy and maritime raiding in the Malay Archipelago. In the same period, however, Dutch commercial activities and demand for slaves stimulated piratical activity and slave- raiding. From the end of the eighteenth century, under the influence of Enlightenment ideas of race and civilisation, piracy in the Strait of Malacca, as in the Spanish Philippines and elsewhere in the Malay Archipelago, also became increasingly linked to ethnicity, race and religion. In the eyes of British and Dutch observers, the maritime culture of the coastal Malays, combined with their presumed racial characteristics and adherence to Islam, seemed to make them natural and inveterate pirates, more or less on a par with the Iranun, Sama and Tausug of the southern Philippines.

The use of the term *piracy* by the Dutch and British to describe entire communities of Malay and other Southeast Asian seafarers served to legitimise the use of often indiscriminate maritime violence, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century. Such rhetoric and the antipiracy operations that the Dutch and British undertook in the Strait of Malacca and other parts of the archipelago served to justify territorial expansion and the acquisition of commercial advantages. Ironically, however, much of the piratical activity that the Europeans set out to suppress was triggered by intensified European expansion and commercial penetration, which served to integrate maritime Southeast Asia in the global commercial system, fuelling the demand for slaves and export products from the region, and creating an influx of firearms and munitions that were used for raiding purposes. European trading stations in the region, particularly Singapore, also provided suitable landbases for pirates and markets for pirated goods and captives.

As the monopolistic commercial policies of the Dutch East India Company gave way to the free trade regime promoted by the British after 1815, piracy began to be seen, particularly by the British, but also by the Dutch, as a serious threat to the commerce and prosperity of the region. Although Europeans were only to a small extent the direct targets of piratical attacks, the British in particular had a strong economic interest in the protection of indigenous trade, which was a cornerstone of the prosperity and success of Singapore and the

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other Straits Settlements. The provision of commercial opportunities to indigenous traders and producers was also seen as a way of weaning piratical Malays and other indigenous groups away from their vile occupation.

The problem of piracy was particularly acute in the Strait of Malacca in the 1830s and 1840s, leading colonial officials, military officers and others to adopt a highly securitising discourse on piracy. Chinese, Malay and other Asian businessmen based in the Strait Settlements were also among the leading proponents of decisive measures to suppress piracy. The outcome was that numerous brutal antipiracy campaigns were launched, often involving the wholesale killing and destruction of allegedly piratical villages and communities. The campaigns were most intense and lethal in north Borneo in the 1840s, but they were also conducted in and around the Strait of Malacca by both Dutch and British authorities.

From the mid nineteenth century the increased use of steam navigation and improved intelligence for the suppression of piracy brought about a decline in the large-scale organised raiding by Malay (if not Chinese) perpetrators. In just a couple of decades, in the 1840s and 1850s, the back of the traditional Malay system of maritime raiding was broken and replaced by the maritime security regime set up by the colonial powers. Whereas the new system certainly was exploitative and biased in favour of the European colonisers, it did bring about a significant improvement in maritime security for most seafarers and coastal populations in the Strait of Malacca and other parts of maritime Southeast Asia. In several respects, intensified colonial expansion from the middle of the nineteenth century constituted an important break with the past, but its significance with regard to maritime security should not be exaggerated. Political stability and the centralisation of power had historically on several occasions led to improved maritime security and a decline in piratical activity in the Strait of Malacca, for example, under the hegemony of Srivijaya or the Sultanate of Melaka.

Although piracy had ceased to be a security threat in the Strait of Malacca by the 1860s, it continued to be used to justify colonial expansion, particularly in the 1870s, both by the British in Selangor and Perak, and by the Dutch in Aceh. As in previous decades, the business community, particularly in the Straits Settlements, was among the most vocal advocates of decisive measures, including military intervention and colonisation, in order to suppress piratical activity. Many senior colonial officials were also leading proponents of intervention, although others, such as Peter Benson Maxwell, were not. Consequently, in both the British and the Dutch contexts, there were critical voices, both in the colonies and in the metropoles, who questioned the way dubious allegations of piracy were used as a pretext for intervention and territorial expansion. The strategy of invoking piracy as a security threat thus always risked backfiring, as was most clearly demonstrated by the public criticism in London against the British intervention in Selangor in 1871.

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Particularly in the British context – where there was great sensitivity about the use of excessive violence to suppress piracy after the brutal campaigns in north Borneo in the 1840s – such criticism seems to have had a tempering effect and served to restrain the use of maritime violence to deal with the sporadic piratical activity that remained, or resurged, in the Strait of Malacca after the middle of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the Dutch, French and Spanish, the British also tended to use negotiations and gunboat diplomacy, rather than direct military violence or wars of colonial conquest, in order to achieve their political and commercial objectives in the Malay Peninsula during most of the second half of the nineteenth century.

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